



# GCE Examiners' Report

English Literature  
AS/A level  
Summer 2024

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.	<a href="https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/">https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/</a>
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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a> 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: <a href="#">Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)</a>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a>
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.	<a href="https://resources.wjec.co.uk/">https://resources.wjec.co.uk/</a>
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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a> 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.	<a href="#">Become an Examiner   WJEC</a>

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## Executive Summary

All papers functioned as expected with all questions proving accessible enough to all candidates and challenging enough to be able to differentiate between them. All examiners noted the increasing issues with handwriting amongst candidates. There are more and more responses which are very difficult to read and to assess. Centres should pay serious attention to this issue.

There were some sophisticated, analytical essays in Unit 1 which maintained an academic register. The Principal Examiner noted that some candidates spent too long on the Part (i) question, affecting the quality elsewhere. Planning responses beforehand allowed candidates to organise their ideas and to produce a structured and coherent response. Opportunities for candidates to complete timed essay practice under exam conditions so that they are accustomed to planning and then writing the essay in 40 minutes is crucial. Successful candidates used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5 where assessed. Close textual analysis is frequently the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations. In Section B, it was good to see greater attention being paid to the dramatic nature of the texts.

In Unit 2, the Principal Examiner noted that some confident responses were seen with some detailed analysis. Some candidates seemed to address the named poem in Section A with little confidence, suggesting that they were not familiar with their set texts. With five AOs to balance in Section B, successful candidates planned carefully before writing and gave careful consideration to how meaning was created. Where AO3, AO4 and AO5 were productive, they were always being used to enhance the reading of the poems (AO2). Too many rely on biographical detail for AO3 instead of considering the broader literary, cultural, social, historical and political contexts which influence the reading and the reception of the set texts. Those who made good use of literary contexts to enhance their reading of the poetry were almost always working at Band 5. Work needs to be done in dealing with poetry as poetry and building candidates' confidence with this form.

The Principal Examiner noted that some excellent responses were seen across all texts in Section A and that many wrote confidently as they compared the two unseen poems in Section B. It was good to see that more attention paid to *literary* contexts including ideas which were discussed at the Professional Learning events in the spring and available online. There can still be a tendency to use pre-prepared essays in the exam which is rarely a productive approach. More important than anything else, perhaps, was the Principal Examiner's reminder that Unit 3 is a poetry paper. Anything that is written should add to the appreciation and understanding of the words and lines that make up the poem. The poet's words come first.

In Unit 4, it was excellent to see the detailed level of preparation evident as many candidates referred precisely to a range of evidence from their chosen play. Candidates still slipped into writing lengthy introductions to the extract in Section A rather than getting to grips with the extract itself. References to the extract in the essay in Section B, should be minimal as candidates cannot be rewarded twice for the same material. As mentioned in last year's report, candidates who scored highly on AO3 drew upon a range of contexts, and actively aimed to establish the connections between text and context. Candidates are reminded that they are provided with an interpretation of their chosen text as part of the question. Engaging with this view of the play can help ensure an informed response, and support engagement with other interpretations (AO5).

The most successful centres in Unit 5 (NEA) are able to balance the thorough reinforcement of the skills necessary to analyse prose texts with an encouragement towards independent study. These areas are crucial in ensuring the most successful results for candidates: a thoughtful selection of texts and tasks, an emphasis on analysis of prose techniques as the driving force of the response, careful use of online study resources and secure and well-informed assessment. The Principal Moderator noted that some text combinations accompanied by directives to explore social class, female subjugation or racial oppression almost inevitably lead to responses dominated by context. Setting tasks can be a time-consuming activity but it is an essential one. AO2 was the least secure element in many candidates' responses. More candidates now resort to a commentary style, with embedded quotation but without analysis, or to the assertion of ideas without textual support. The most successful centres and candidates understand that this unit begins with thorough knowledge and understanding of the texts as a result of close reading.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Close textual analysis is frequently the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.	<a href="#">Close Analysis of Prose Fiction</a>	This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content covering Unit 1, Section A: a close analysis of prose fiction.
More work needs to be done in dealing with poetry as poetry and building candidates' confidence with this form.	<a href="#">Developing Analytical And Comparative Approaches To Poetry</a>	This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content covering A level Unit 2, Section B: Making connections across poets and poems.
Those who made good use of literary contexts to enhance their reading of the poetry were almost always working at Band 5.	<a href="#">Teaching Poetry CPD 2023-2024</a>	This resource can currently be found on the Portal. There is a PowerPoint presentation and an accompanying booklet of resources.
Candidates are provided with an interpretation of their chosen drama text as part of the questions set, and engaging with this view of the play can help ensure an informed response, and support engagement with other interpretations	<a href="#">Teaching Drama CPD 2021</a>	In 2021, the focus of the CPD was on Teaching Drama. The materials from that event can be found on the Portal.

<p>Task-setting for the NEA is essential for centres seeking the best outcomes for their candidates.</p>	<p><a href="#">Task-setting Exercise 1</a> <a href="#">Task-setting Exercise 2</a></p>	<p>These resources are from the 2018 CPD series and can be found on the WJEC AS/A level English Literature site, under the 'Training' tab.</p>
<p>In Unit 5, the most successful centres recognise that they will still need considerable reinforcement of their understanding of the novel form and its conventions.</p>	<p><a href="#">Comparing Prose Texts</a></p>	<p>This blended learning resource contains interactive self-study content covering Unit 5: Comparing prose text.</p>

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCE

Summer 2024

### UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

#### Overview of the Unit

Once again, examiners commented on the quality of many of the candidates' responses across Section A and Section B. They were sophisticated, analytical and maintained an academic register.

As expected, the most popular choice of text for Section A was, by far, *Jane Eyre*; however, it was extremely pleasing to see a distinct rise in popularity of centres opting to study *North and South*. Indeed, it was enjoyable to read the candidates' engagement with the extract passage on Dixon as the majority of responses used this as a springboard into the essay. As mentioned in previous Principal Examiner's reports, this text often allows candidates to simultaneously weave together AO2 and AO3. Nevertheless, it was disappointing to see very limited candidates responding to *David Copperfield* as this, albeit lengthy text, allows candidates many opportunities to address contextual factors and explore the complexities of the mid-Victorian period. In regard to Section B, *A Streetcar Named Desire* was the most popular choice of text but the increase of centres choosing to study *Top Girls* was notable. A vast number of responses to the *Top Girls* questions were confident and demonstrated a sound understanding of the impact of the historical characters as well as the contextual influence of Margaret Thatcher's government.

Overall, the quality of some responses produced was exceptional, especially as this is a closed-book exam: candidates are to be commended for their hard work and thorough exam preparation.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A: Prose Fiction Pre-1900

##### Extract:

##### AO1

- It should be remembered that AO3 and AO5 are not assessed for Part (i) and responses that allude to irrelevant contextual information or critical readings are self-penalising.
- It was, however, pleasing to see the vast majority of candidates maintaining focus on the extract as they avoided drifting into a narrative re-telling of the plot and analysing other parts of the novel, which is not relevant for Section A, Part (i).
- As stated in the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 paper, it is advised that 20 minutes is spent on Section A, Part (i). A significant minority of candidates spent too long on this question which affected the quality of their Part (ii) response. This approach also has consequences for the time allocated for Section B.

##### AO2

- It is important that candidates explore the effect of the writer's techniques and use of language rather than simply embedding quotations as a means of supporting a narrative re-telling of the extract. Many candidates did this successfully and commented on the significance of narrative voice too.

## **Essay: AO1**

- It was pleasing to see many candidates plan their responses beforehand which allowed them to organise their ideas and produce an effectively structured and coherent response. As mentioned in previous reports, it is important that teachers provide opportunities for candidates to complete timed essay practice under exam conditions so that they are accustomed to planning and then writing the essay in 40 minutes. It is vital to note, however, that examiners cannot award marks for planning, regardless of how detailed they may be. Indeed, at times, examiners found that detailed planning meant that the essays were underdeveloped, and candidates had, on occasion, resorted to bullet-pointing the end of the essay as timing had become an issue.
- There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches to answering the essay question.
- As discussed at Professional Learning events, centres should inform candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay and that reliance on the extract is self-penalising.
- As accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar is assessed under AO1, some candidates' marks were negatively affected as these inaccuracies led to a lack of clarity and fluency of expression.

## **AO2**

- As mentioned at Professional Learning events and in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, centres should advise candidates that, although this is a closed book exam, they are expected to integrate and evaluate relevant quotations from across the novel.
- As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created, producing a narrative-driven response. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- Many candidates discussed the characters as constructs and commented on the ways writers' shape their presentations which is to be further encouraged.
- Once again, it is useful to emphasise that many successful candidates used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5. Close textual analysis is frequently the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.

## **AO3**

- Although there is a heavy weighting for AO3, the most successful responses remained focused on the significance and influence of contexts, using relevant contextual information to inform a discussion of the text.
- Numerous examiners commented on the significant number of candidates that drifted away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of contextual information which seemed pre-rehearsed. As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, large paragraphs of unrelated contextual references, including lengthy biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake.
- Band 5 responses made effective use of specific contextual detail, as opposed to historical commentary, and linked it confidently to their chosen text. Indeed, candidates are, once again, advised to use the formula '*task-text-context*' to ensure that context informs rather than drives their response.

## AO5

- Candidates must use other relevant opinion to *inform* their *own* discussion of the text and build a *personal* response. Indeed, the stronger responses used alternative views to create a sense of debate.
- As seen previously, lengthy sweeping statements from critics which are not fully integrated into the candidate's argument did little to help them achieve the higher bands.
- As stated previously, centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:
  - *Engaging with specific critical views* (i.e. literary criticism)
  - *Engaging with critical perspectives* i.e. (Marxism/feminism)
  - Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps' or 'suggests'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.

### **Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility***

It is wonderful to see this text growing in popularity and examiners thoroughly enjoyed reading many responses which effectively drew upon the influence of Jane Austen's Regency context. Indeed, there were many confident and sophisticated responses to both the extract and the essay question as many candidates used the extract's presentation of Marianne as a starting point for a wider discussion of Austen's presentation of women throughout the novel.

### **Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre***

As expected, *Jane Eyre* was the most popular choice of pre-1900 prose text and so a variety of equally valid approaches to the essay question was seen. Indeed, candidates responded well to the demand of the extract, which was from the later part of the text, and were able to 'springboard' into the wider essay question which explored the issue of suffering across the novel as a whole. The majority of candidates tracked Jane's suffering through her childhood trauma in the red room and at Lowood School. Indeed, it was disappointing to see some of the less successful responses only commenting on the opening few chapters of the text with little, to no, acknowledgement of the wider novel: in such cases, AO3 and AO5 were often also neglected. Nevertheless, the more successful responses confidently commented on not only the earlier childhood experiences of Jane, but also on the significance of the suffering experienced by Jane and Bertha at Thornfield as well as the complex depiction of Rochester's suffering at the end of the novel.

### **Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South***

It was a pleasure to see this text growing in popularity and I thoroughly enjoyed reading many responses which looked at the nuanced depiction of the character of Dixon and her relationship with Margaret. This is a contextually rich text, and many candidates explored the ways in which Gaskell successfully blurred the divide between social classes in this Victorian Industrial novel.

### **Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield***

Too few responses were seen on this text to make adequate comment.

### **Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

The accessibility of both the extract and essay question was evident in the quality of responses seen. The vast majority of candidates were able to place the extract as one of the key scenes in Lucetta's struggle and were able to link that with a wider consideration of the power and strength of female characters in the novel.

## Section B: Drama

### AO1

- As noted for Section A and in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, it is important that candidates pay close attention to timings. Indeed, it is advised that candidates spend 60 minutes on Section B so strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing underdeveloped responses for Section B.

### AO2

- The significance of dramatic techniques was clear in this year's series. Indeed, a number of responses demonstrated a confident understanding of writers' use of language and dramatic techniques such as staging, props, lighting, motifs etc.

### AO3

- It is vital that centres encourage candidates to draw upon a range of specific contextual material and avoid overly generalised statements about the historical periods. Some candidates were able to make thoughtful comments about the contexts of reception while others drifted into irrelevant biographical detail. While some biographical detail is important to understand a play's reception, it is important that candidates allude to the impact of biographical detail when analysing language or dramatic technique.
- Once again, centres are to advise candidates to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context *informs* rather than engulfs the response.

### AO5

- As with Section A, candidates must use other *relevant* opinion to *inform* their own discussion of the text and build a *personal* response. Centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:
  - *Engaging with* specific critical views (i.e. literary criticism)
  - *Engaging with* critical perspectives i.e. (Marxism/feminism)
  - Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as 'perhaps,' 'suggests' or 'arguably'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.

### Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

This is a demanding Elizabethan play, but the majority of candidates rose to the challenge of both the task and text. There was an equal balance in popularity between the questions and many candidates explored the relationship between the text and its Renaissance context. It was pleasing to see many responses engage with the question's need for debate by engaging with phrases such as 'the true message of *Doctor Faustus*' and 'Faustus is shown to gain nothing.' This is to be further encouraged.

### Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan*

There were many interesting responses to both questions which demonstrated candidates' confidence with both the play itself as well as contextual influences. However, as mentioned previously, it is important that long pre-rehearsed paragraphs containing detailed biographical information about Oscar Wilde should be discouraged. While it is important for candidates to understand the influence of Wilde's life upon *Lady Windermere's Fan*, this information should be used to illuminate, rather than dominate, textual analysis.

**Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire***

*A Streetcar Named Desire* was the most popular choice of Section B text and Q10 was, by far, the favoured choice of question. It was pleasing to read many sophisticated responses which explored the complexity of Blanche's character and the various ways in which her self-destructive actions had an impact on her fate. Many of the most successful candidates commented on the impact of plastic theatre techniques and the ways in which, for example, music and lighting are used to create meaning.

**Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls***

This play is growing in popularity which is fantastic to see. There was a balance between the two questions and many candidates confidently connected contextual factors with the language of the play, successfully exploring the impact of Caryl Churchill's range of dramatic devices. Indeed, this is a context-rich play, and a number of responses successfully secured the top bands for AO3.

**Brian Friel: *Translations***

This text is quietly growing in popularity and there were many detailed and thoughtful responses seen. Many candidates demonstrated a sound understanding of the play as a whole and successfully explored the ways in which relevant moments in Irish history helped to shape Brian Friel's depiction of both the play's Irish and English characters.

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCE

Summer 2024

### UNIT 2: POETRY POST-1900

#### Overview of the Unit

Examiners were disappointed to note that many responses this year displayed the signs of a lack of preparation and/or revision, which was evident in many Section A and Section B essays. A minority of candidates responded to the texts with perception and sophistication but these, examiners noted, were a rare occurrence. Rubric Infringements persisted again this year with many candidates limiting their Section B responses to two poems. Yet again, some candidates had answered Section B before A. There is no necessity in dealing with Section A first, but where that was not the case, a significant number of candidates dedicated too much time to Section B leaving their answers to the named poem incomplete. In some cases, this affected their marks for Section A, and we would like to emphasise again that centres need to provide more timed practice prior to the exam in order to avoid rushed and incomplete responses.

Duffy and Larkin were again a popular pairing although equally so with Sheers and Heaney. More responses were also seen on Hughes and Plath but only a minority of centres choose to study Thomas and Lewis, and Abse and Yeats.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A: Critical analysis

Some confident responses were seen with some writing in detail and at length for the time allowed. Some answers, however, were overly concise barely reaching a side and a half of the answer booklets. These responses tended to be limited, lacked close analysis of the texts and did not always answer the questions set in enough detail. As we recommend candidates to spend approximately 45 minutes on this section, it is expected that candidates write in some detail.

##### AO1

- Many candidates approached the named poems in Section A as if they were unseen poems, suggesting that they had not studied or revised the text. This, invariably, led to some confused and inaccurate responses.
- Many candidates wrote general analyses on the named poems without focussing on the theme noted. Although aspects of the responses touched upon the themes, the essays lacked application to the questions.
- As accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation is one of the foci of AO1, some candidates' marks were negatively affected by careless errors in expression which led to a lack of clarity.
- Informality in register and tone was still a problem for many candidates. Referring to the poets by their first names and voicing their opinion on the poets' lifestyles does not equate to an academic register.

## AO2

- Examiners saw some detailed and confident analysis of the poems chosen, many with a sophisticated balance between close examination of techniques used and the writer's intended meaning.
- More candidates than ever only dealt with a stream of implicit readings. While these have their place, some literary analysis based on techniques and effect would improve the overall quality of these responses.
- Conversely, some responses depended on technique spotting without any detailed comments. This approach limits the marks awarded and would be improved considerably with an examination of the *effect* of the techniques on the reader and how they are used to create meaning.
- Examiners noted that the strongest responses used a well-chosen selection of quotations and did not attempt to analyse the whole poem within the time given.

### Edward Thomas

Although not a popular choice, examiners commented on some perceptive and thoughtful responses focussing on Thomas' use of imagery and language. However, in some cases, candidates attempted to analyse the whole poem, therefore losing sight of the question focus.

### Alun Lewis

A less popular, but more successful question than Q1. Some responses offered a perceptive analysis of the poem, and it was pleasing to see candidates analyse the mythological and animalistic imagery of the text. A small number dwelt for too long on Lewis' background and his socialist views. AO3 is not assessed in this section.

### W. B. Yeats

A more popular choice than Q4, although many candidates included far too many references to the First World War and Ireland's position in the conflict. This over-inclusion of AO3 was self-penalising for candidates.

### Dannie Abse

A very limited number of candidates attempted this question. Some candidates dealt well with Abse's use of imagery although some missed the question focus on their responses.

### Ted Hughes

This was a very popular question. Examiners commented on some confident responses which dealt with Hughes' language and imagery very well and highlighted the power struggle between the bull and the farmer. However, some candidates produced a very literal reading of the whole poem, resorting to a narrative approach, at times.

### Sylvia Plath

Another popular choice, although many responses were beset with problems. Many candidates misunderstood the text and presented an analysis of the 'monster,' in real not metaphorical terms. This affected their marks considerably.

### **Philip Larkin**

A popular choice where the vast majority of candidates engaged with the first two stanzas only. The strongest responses discussed Larkin's depiction of the train and the views from the window but many candidates' mis-interpreted the text completely: 'Whitsun' is not a place and Larkin was not travelling with his wife. Alternative interpretations are only useful alongside an accepted interpretation. Unfortunately, many candidates put forward an alternative view only.

### **Carol Ann Duffy**

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper and it was one in which many candidates responded successfully. Some responses were a little confused as to who the 'good' teachers were in the text, but many candidates dealt with Duffy's use of imagery well. Some responses were too general and lacked focus on Duffy's portrayal of the teachers.

### **Seamus Heaney**

A less popular choice than Sheers' poem, examiners commented on many successful responses which discussed Heaney's creation of atmosphere successfully. Some weaknesses included an incomplete reading of the poem with little or no mention of imagery. There was also, unfortunately, very little reference to Heaney's use of an anecdotal tone throughout the poem.

### **Owen Sheers**

This proved to be a very popular choice with some original (although frequently inaccurate) observations made on the role of the farrier. Many candidates commented on the intimate relationship between the farrier and the mare, but many misread the poem and asserted a sexual relationship. Centres are reminded that alternative interpretations have their place but not at the detriment of a traditional, accepted view.

## **Section B: Poetry comparison**

### **AO1**

- Planning remains a key element in this section as balancing all five AOs needs clear structuring. Stronger responses in this section usually showed clear evidence of planning. It is recommended that candidates spend 10 to 15 minutes of their 1 ¼ hour planning their essays as structuring and developing their argument is crucial.
- Sadly, many Rubric Infringements were seen this year, mainly with candidates focusing on fewer than the four poems required. In some cases, candidates only responded to two poems despite managing to write extensively and completing their essay. We would like to remind centres to emphasise the need to use four poems (two from each poet) to their candidates.
- It was pleasing to see fewer candidates using poems named in Section A. This also constitutes a Rubric Infringement and can affect the marking.
- Informality continues to be a problem with many candidates writing in a non-academic register.

### **AO2**

- Stronger essays included an analysis of specific textual evidence as a link to contextual detail.
- Some candidates analysed their chosen poems in full, tracking through each line. This is unnecessary and time-consuming.

- Examiners noted that it was pleasing to see some thoughtful and purposeful discussion of the poets' use of structure as well as close analysis of language and literary techniques.
- The use of linguistic terminology should be restricted. It is only ever useful if it is developed into sound discussion of how meaning is created.

### **AO3**

- For the second year, examiners noted many Section B responses without any reference to AO3. This is worrying, especially when seen across whole centres.
- Contextual details were most successful when linked to specific aspects of the poems chosen while also linked to the question. Some original contextual links were seen but some, unfortunately, were not always relevant to the question.
- Band 5 answers made excellent use of specific context linked to poems / quotations and included social, literary and historical context not merely general biographical detail.
- Context was woven into the essays more this year and not tagged on to the end of responses.
- The inaccuracy of some contextual detail is still a matter of concern as some candidates referred to incorrect birthdates, locations and relationships.
- Examiners saw many underdeveloped contextual links. As this AO is worth 20 marks, specific details are recommended.

### **AO4**

- Some excellent connections were made between texts with the strongest discussing similarities and differences while using specific quotations or commenting on the poets' use of techniques. However, due to lack of planning, links in some responses were very sparse.
- Stronger responses included connections throughout and not just after the analysis of two poems.
- It is recommended that candidates develop their links as many stated the connection between the poems but limited their marks by failing to expand upon their ideas.
- Attempting to link four poems simultaneously is unwise as it almost inevitably leads to a superficial approach.
- Centres are reminded that linking poems by the same poet provides a limited scope for discussion.

### **AO5**

- More perceptive candidates dealt with this element with confidence and sophistication, weaving their critical discussion throughout their responses.
- Some candidates named critics and provided quotations from their sources which should be regarded as a prompt for critical discussion. Sadly, unless the candidate develops the view by linking it to the poem/ quotation, their marks are limited.
- Likewise, examiners again saw the overuse of “arguably” or “perhaps” without a following interpretation or discussion. This approach could limit the candidate to Band 2 as they only acknowledge an interpretation.

### **Thomas and Lewis**

Examiners read some interesting and well-developed responses on the texts with the strongest candidates linking Lewis and Thomas' poems with confidence. The strongest responses to Q 11 dealt with Thomas' ties to Hampshire through his portrayal of country life and Lewis' ambivalent relationship with Wales. However, some candidates overemphasised the poets' depression in response to Q12 while ignoring other separations depicted in the poems. It is vital that centres teach only the prescribed list of poems as some candidates lost marks referencing poems not on the list.

### **Yeats and Abse**

A very small number of candidates studied these texts, but some answers displayed a generally well-balanced approach to the AOs required. Connections between Yeats' and Abse's poems were interesting, but examiners would remind centres that specific text based links are generally more successful than merely context based links.

### **Hughes and Plath**

Question 16 was by far the most popular of the two questions with many candidates successfully exploring Hughes and Plath's contrasting depiction of disturbing situations in their poems. The most successful responses examined elements beyond Plath's death or suicide attempts. Some candidates wrote responses to 'disturbance' which was not precisely the focus of the question. A recurring issue with this pairing is that some candidates over-emphasise the relationship between the poets without considering their influences beyond that relationship. Fewer attempted Q15 but although they avoided the context of the poets' relationship, they tended to make too much use of Hughes' farming background to support or assert their points.

### **Larkin and Duffy**

Larkin and Duffy continued to be a very popular choice for centres and therefore a wide range of responses were seen by examiners. Q17 was clearly the most popular with the most successful answers including some perceptive and well-selected contextual detail. However, candidates dealt with a very narrow range of poems and, at times, seemed to force the theme onto the text. For example, the depiction of love in 'A Study of Reading Habits' is very fleeting and brief. Sweeping statements about the poets' private lives were prevalent again, with many candidates offering inaccurate contextual details. Precision and accuracy are vital for AO3.

### **Heaney and Sheers**

Both questions proved to be popular this year. Examiners saw a range of responses using a generally relevant choice of poems although many concentrated on the poets' experiences of bereavement only for Q20. Responses to Q19 made use of a broader range of poems for Heaney although some candidates included more of Sheers' industrial poems such as 'The Steelworks' with limited success. AO3 in responses to both questions tended to be dominated by Heaney with references to his family, his marriage and his life in Ireland and California at the expense of Sheers.

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCE

Summer 2024

### UNIT 3: POETRY PRE-1900 AND UNSEEN POETRY

#### Overview of the Unit

##### Handwriting

Let's get it out of the way at the start. Many assistant examiners reported how difficult it was this year to read many of the scripts. The problem did seem to be worse than in previous years. Could it be that candidates are no longer writing by hand their essays in school or college? If that is the case, it's not surprising that under time pressure in the exam their handwriting might deteriorate. Fair assessment depends on legibility.

##### AO3

Context should be clearly linked to question and text. The point has been made many times in reports and exam advice. The majority of candidates integrate context and text with some skill but this year it did appear that some centres and students had forgotten the advice. Responses which began with biographies of the poet and summaries of contextual influences ran the danger of neglecting to focus on the key words of the question. Candidates who stopped to write paragraphs of contextual material often lost touch with the discussion of the poetry itself. Unit 3 is a poetry paper, anything that is written should add to the appreciation and understanding of the words and lines that make up the poem. The poet's words come first.

##### AO3: a more pleasing development

This year there was more attention paid to *literary* contexts. Candidates wrote confidently about the genres of courtly romance and fabliaux in their Chaucer responses; students of Donne made a lot of the influence of Petrarch; Shakespeare and the Classics made frequent appearance in answers on Milton; Romanticism was used sensibly in discussions of Blake; candidates made relevant use of Rossetti's Italian literary background. It was good to see these ideas, which were discussed at the Professional Learning events in the spring and available online, impact candidates' reading of the poetry.

##### Answering the question

It is dangerous to rely on a classroom essay in the exam. For example, some of Donne answers to 2 (ii) were clearly based on essays that candidates had written on death and love in Donne's poetry. Bringing in the key words, disappointment and loss, at the end of paragraphs didn't really disguise this. A better approach would be to refer directly to the key words and to poems relevant to the question in the first paragraph, offering at the same time the kinds of loss and disappointment that are about to be discussed.

##### How many poems?

Two poems can narrow the range and depth of points a candidate is able to make. Three relevant poems offer more opportunities. Making use of the poem or extract from Part (i) suggests the candidate has studied fewer poems than the preparation for this unit requires.

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### Section A

#### Chaucer

Most responses were good to very good indeed. When it came to examples of selfishness and self-delusion candidates were spoiled for choice. And in a way that could be a problem as some candidates tried to cover every character and every example of selfishness. The strongest responses were focussed and selective, making sure their answers looked closely at language and made use of relevant contextual influences. Some candidates didn't perform quite as well at Part (i) as they might have done if they had been more aware of who was speaking and the ironic attitude behind many of the comments about marriage.

#### Donne

Part (i) saw extremes. Either very good on the effects of love, getting to grips with the 'metaphysical' imagery, or, floundering a bit, as though this was the first time the candidate had seen the poem. With Part (ii) there was much to admire, in the responses of candidates who ingeniously made use of not so appropriate poems, such as 'The Flea,' or in those responses who sensibly divided up their answers into three parts: disappointment and loss in love, in women and in Donne's religious life. At AO3 some candidates placed too much reliance on, or made too many references to, Donne's family life.

#### Milton

In Part (i), most candidates wrote confidently about the complexity of Milton's presentation of Adam, as both patriarch and lover of Eve. There was often a subtlety about the answers which suggested a genuine engagement with Milton's ambition in writing *Paradise Lost*. Part (ii) included answers which went well beyond simply focussing on Adam. Candidates brought in God (kings) and Satan (Shakespearean villains) and explored the inconsistencies in Milton's presentation of 'male superiority and patriarchy.' Responses which took a narrative approach were weaker.

#### Blake

On the whole, candidates wrote confidently about Blake's presentation of the schoolboy. The strongest responses to Part (ii), looked at how Blake used references to nature, flora and fauna, to explore his views on childhood, freedom, the working world, the established church and authority. Candidates who wrote more about how Blake described the natural world itself, often lost the focus on the 'makes use' wording in the question.

#### Rossetti

Rossetti candidates seemed especially well prepared. Writing about the set poem, most saw how the poem tells us more about the afterlife by writing about this one and brought this out very clearly. The key to answering Part (ii) was choosing appropriate poems such as 'Up-Hill,' 'Sweet Death,' 'Out of the Deep' and 'Tune me.' It wasn't easy to make use of 'Goblin Market' for example. Also important was the choice of contextual references, the influence of, for example, Tractarianism, the Bible, the Romantics, Petrarch and Dante. Some candidates relied too much on biographical knowledge. It has its place, of course, but can become a readymade explanation for too many poems.

## Section B

Many candidates started their response with Q6, the question with most marks. All the possible pairings were used, but Poem A with D was the most popular. These were the two shortest poems; the two earliest (19th century), and, it could be argued, the two most conceptual. Candidates wrote confidently about the aural effects, key features of both poems, picking out in particular the effects of alliteration. And engaged with the emotional experiences expressed through the snow imagery. They often commented on how the poems were like elaborately extended metaphors. Most noticed the use of religious language and attitudes in the words. Some candidates looked too far in their attempts to find narratives of human, even possible sexual, relationships in the poems, convinced the poets were writing about 'real,' visible experiences they had gone through. This sometimes led to distorted readings of the poems as candidates tried to fit them to stories, they believed the poets meant to tell. Any speculation about meanings, however, depends on close analysis of words and lines, assertions will not do. Narratives were more convincingly found in poems B and C, with candidates basing their answers on the vividness of the childhood experiences in B and the frightening effects of the blizzard in C. The number of candidates who did not write about compulsory poem A (Longfellow) this year was very small. (They lost all the marks for AO4). There were, however, some candidates who wrote about more than two poems.

Candidates often used the poems' titles as a way in to exploring attitudes to snow and kinds of language in the poems. When they wrote about form, candidates who looked closely at syntax and line endings were more convincing than others who simply asserted that, for example, the shape of Longfellow's poem deliberately resembled the pattern of falling snow. Candidates who also convinced were those who analysed the effects of particular rhymes, such as 'slow/snow' and 'reveals/feels' (Longfellow) and 'sodden/untrodden' and 'fold/old' (Wilcox).

As always in the unseen poems section, there was some thrilling engagement with the poems, some extraordinarily sensitive readings. There were some astonishing achievements in exam conditions. Nevertheless, some candidates misread 'bosom' as blossom in the opening line of Poem A and failed to recognise the word's re-emergence at the end of the poem. That misreading also missed the connection to 'the cloud-folds of her garments' in the second line, words which are also echoed in the 'cloudy bosom' of the poem's ending. They further missed how 'the bosom of the Air' of the opening line is transposed into 'the poem of the air' of the ending and missed how the snow has magically been transformed into words on paper, becoming the poem they are reading.

When this happens where does the problem lie? With lack of attention? With the slackness of 'inaccuracies' of social media messaging? With something missing in early years teaching? With a society where impressions matter more than substance? Or, surely more relevantly, are we looking at a situation where not enough time has been spent in the two years reading and talking about a range of poetry?

'Bosom' misread as blossom. And elsewhere in the scripts: dissapointing, repitition, beggining, recieve, Rosetti; all as common as their originals. More attention needs to be given to such detail.

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCE

Summer 2024

### UNIT 4: SHAKESPEARE

#### Overview of the Unit

Once again, the standard of candidates' responses was impressive, and it was excellent to see the detailed level of preparation evident as many candidates were able to refer precisely to a range of evidence from their chosen Shakespeare play. Once again, a majority of centres focused on either *King Lear*, or *Hamlet*, with *The Tempest* also being studied by a significant number of centres.

In Section A, the extract question, candidates are assessed on AO1 and AO2. It was pleasing to see that last year's report and the advice in relation to focusing on these assessment objectives had been heeded, with only a few responses commenting on context (AO3) within these responses. However, the trend for some candidates to write overly lengthy introductions to Section A responses persisted, with many responses discussing the play as a whole, or offering a summary of how characters had been presented prior to, or after the selected extract. Once again, it is worthwhile noting that including a brief consideration of such points can help and support candidates, however, it is vital that responses to Section A get to grips with the extract itself and avoid overly long introductions (in some instances over a page of writing).

It is also timely to remind candidates of careful reading of the questions, and their relevant focus. For example, this year's extract question on *The Tempest* focused on the presentation of Caliban, yet too many candidates dedicated significant sections of their answers to exploring how Prospero had been presented, rather than how Prospero illuminated or informed their discussion of Caliban.

In Section B, candidates are expected to respond to questions in the light of the texts as a whole. This year, some candidates tended to spend too much time within their essays focusing on the extracts already explored within Section A. Although this can be relevant, for example, discussion of Lear's deteriorating mental state in response to the question on 'errors of judgment,' candidates need to select evidence from a range of scenes within the play, and narrowing this selection to a single scene or episode can prove problematic, particularly in relation to AO1.

Within this section, context is heavily weighted and accounts for 30 marks. As was mentioned in last year's report, candidates who score highly on AO3 are able to draw upon a range of contexts, and actively aim to establish the connections between text and context. Candidates who explore context in isolation from their texts or begin with a contextually-driven introduction can be disadvantaged in their responses. Additionally, it would be worthwhile reminding candidates that they are provided with an interpretation of their chosen drama text as part of the questions set, and that engaging with this view of the play can help ensure an informed response, and support engagement with other interpretations (AO5).

As was noted last year, particularly extensive and long essays often tend to deteriorate as they progress. Again this year, a significant number of candidates who produced such lengthy responses tended to stray from the required focus of the question, and often looked at characters in isolation, rather than the significance of the play as a whole. Such responses can often indicate a lack of organisation and planning. I would once again echo last year's advice in stating that it might prove useful for such candidates to spend some time planning and producing a more focused and organised response.

## **Comments on individual questions/sections**

### **Section A**

#### ***King Lear***

*King Lear* was again the most popular text choice this year. The extract focused on the presentation of Lear, as he took refuge in the hovel during the storm and candidates engaged enthusiastically with this part of the play. Stronger responses were able to comment on the connection between the literal storm and Lear's state of mind at this point in the play, drawing upon concepts of a tragic hero which helped illuminate such answers. Less successful responses included too much discussion of events prior to this point in the play, particularly Lear's relationship with his daughters which led to less focused analysis of this scene.

#### ***Antony and Cleopatra***

Candidates responded well to the dual focus on the presentation of Antony and Enobarbus. Successful responses commented on Antony's dismissal of Enobarbus' advice, and his manipulation by Cleopatra.

#### ***Hamlet***

This was again the second most popular text choice. Most candidates engaged with the demands of the question which required exploration of the characters of both Hamlet and the Ghost. Successful candidates developed their responses to include a consideration of the relationship and how the Ghost influences Hamlet, drawing upon Shakespeare's choice of imagery and metaphor. It was pleasing to see some detailed exploration of Hamlet's obsession with his mother's actions, and discussion of the imagery of 'thorns.'

#### ***King Henry IV Part 1***

A very small number of candidates studied this text. It was pleasing to note how candidates had engaged with Worcester's anger and sense of betrayal by the King.

#### ***The Tempest***

The more successful candidates' responses here focused on Caliban, drawing upon how Shakespeare's presentation of Prospero deepened or illuminated their understanding of Caliban's sense of injustice. It was pleasing to see some thoughtful discussion of Shakespeare's use of imagery to explore Caliban's demands for vengeance.

## Section B

### ***King Lear***

Question 6 was the most popular option for candidates. Candidates were able to comment on how 'errors of judgement' led to 'fatal consequences' and stronger responses closely explored the relationship between these concepts, often using Lear's status as a tragic hero as the central focus and the basis of arguments within this question. Candidates who responded to Question 7 focused on the presentation of younger and older characters within the play and commented in detail on critical judgements of older characters like Lear and Gloucester, with some thoughtful discussion of youth, often illuminated by explorations of Cordelia, Edgar and Edmund.

Occasionally, some responses to this question tended to result in a series of character studies, as opposed to a wider appreciation of their dynamics within the play. It was pleasing to note in relation to both questions an increased number of candidates making productive use of staged productions of the play to inform AO5, and this supported some insightful exploration of the play.

### ***Antony and Cleopatra***

Candidates responded to both questions in relatively equal numbers. Question 8 focused on Cleopatra's 'superiority', whereas Question 9 explored the conflicts between 'Rome and Egypt', and 'duty and desire'. It was pleasing to see how candidates engaged with these concepts, and they were able to draw upon a wide range of key moments in the play to illuminate their understanding.

### ***Hamlet***

Question 10 was the most popular option on *Hamlet*, with some enthusiastic responses to Shakespeare's inability to draw 'a clear line between good and evil'. Many successful candidates explored how these binary concepts are blurred within Shakespeare's play, commenting on Hamlet and Claudius in particular, with some detailed discussion of Hamlet's dilemma in his role as a revenger. Question 11 produced some insightful responses on the concept of the 'state' within Shakespeare's play, drawing effectively upon contextual factors to illuminate their responses, particularly in relation to issues of Kingship and contemporary political conflicts.

### ***King Henry IV Part 1***

Of the few candidates who chose this text, nearly all candidates responded to Question 12, which explored the 'development of the future King' within the play, and it was encouraging to note enthusiastic engagement with the text, and ideas of kingship were explored productively within the play.

### ***The Tempest***

Question 14 proved the most popular question choice in relation to *The Tempest*. Candidates engaged effectively with the concept of the 'journey towards redemption and forgiveness' often using Prospero's character arc to structure their responses. Question 15 focused on the 'celebration of the power and natural world', with successful essays looking at how magic within the play is often manipulated.

## Summary of Key Points

- In Section A, the Shakespeare extract, there were some excellent responses where candidates had focused on language and imagery in relation to the specific demands of the question. It was pleasing to see some detailed discussion on form in responses, including Shakespeare's use of prose and blank verse, and its significance within the chosen extracts.
- As mentioned earlier, candidates should avoid overly long introductions to this question. The focus needs to be on exploring the language of the extract.
- Successful candidates explored the dramatic significance of Shakespeare's language, with better candidates commenting effectively on stagecraft.
- In Section B, successful candidates were able to balance all relevant assessment objectives and maintained a close focus on the questions posed, demonstrating a secure grasp of relevant concepts.
- Context is heavily weighted in Section B, but it is vital that candidates are reminded that context must always relate to, or be rooted within their discussion of the text. Occasionally, some candidates relied upon a contextually-driven approach, or explored context in isolation, often seen in the introduction to essays. If context is not clearly linked to the text, there is a limit to which band can be awarded for AO3.
- Candidates should be encouraged to use the critical view provided by the question to stay focused on task. The critical view can also help to inform wider interpretation of the play (addressed in AO5).
- Use of material from the extract should be kept to a minimum in Section B, which is testing candidates' knowledge of the overall play.
- As mentioned previously, overly long essays tended to deteriorate, in terms of quality of expression and analysis, as the responses progressed. It would be useful to encourage candidates to recognise planning as a valuable part of the writing process.
- As noted in last year's report, handwriting that is difficult to read can make the awarding of marks difficult. It is certainly worth considering whether candidates might fare better if they use a word processor.

# ENGLISH LITERATURE

## GCE

Summer 2024

### UNIT 5 (NEA): PROSE STUDY

#### Overview of the Unit

The Unit 5 Prose Study assesses all five of the Assessment Objectives and requires candidates to demonstrate their understanding of all the skills developed through the study of English Literature at GCE level. As the only NEA element of this specification, it is a valuable opportunity for candidates to pursue their own interests in terms of texts and tasks. Preparing for the Prose Study should be an enjoyable experience that gives candidates the freedom to read widely and consider a range of ideas and viewpoints. It allows them to craft an argument in more depth than would be the case in an exam situation, and to employ a range of supporting detail gleaned from their prose texts and their wider reading. At its best, the Prose Study provides an excellent grounding in the academic skills that will be vital to candidates in further education and the world of work. The most successful centres are those able to balance the thorough reinforcement of the skills necessary to analyse prose texts with an encouragement towards independent study.

Moderators' experiences this year were largely similar to those in 2023, with strengths and areas for development remaining broadly as in previous years. Much of the advice that follows should therefore be familiar, but this makes it all the more important that centres take these points on board in order to secure the best outcomes for their candidates.

As has been the case in previous years, the following areas are crucial in ensuring the most successful results for candidates:

- Thoughtful selection of texts and tasks
- An emphasis on analysis of prose techniques as the driving force of the response
- Careful use of online study resources
- Secure and well-informed assessment

This report will contain reference to examples of best practice and problem areas from this year's submissions, but centres are strongly advised also to consult the Principal Moderator's Reports from 2022 and 2023 for a comprehensive review of this unit.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Tasks

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

##### 1. Text combinations and task-setting

###### Text selection and combination

At a time when we are repeatedly told that reading is in decline, it was pleasing to see the originality and ambition shown by some centres in their text selections.

Where teachers are themselves keen readers, they are best placed to guide their candidates in making original choices with an appropriate level of challenge, particularly with regard to their post-2000 texts. Moderators noted that candidates writing about more recently published or less frequently studied texts generally had fewer online study resources at their disposal; this was often beneficial as it led to closer textual study and more originality. How texts are combined is also important to success, however, and some pairings continue to be very popular even though they do not always serve candidates well. *The Great Gatsby* with *Atonement*, *The Handmaid's Tale* with *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and 'The Color Purple' with *The Help* all continue to be hugely popular pairings. While all these novels have been accepted by WJEC and are fruitful texts for study, in combination they can encourage a one-note approach and a focus on contextual detail over literary analysis.

With so much contextual material readily available online, such text combinations accompanied by directives to explore social class, female subjugation or racial oppression almost inevitably lead to responses dominated by context. Perhaps in part as a consequence of the pandemic, moderators have seen a rise in popularity of the study of dystopian texts since 2022, with *The Road*, *The School for Good Mothers* and *Station Eleven* all popular partners for *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. There is no doubt that these texts are all rich in possibilities for close literary study. Centres may wish to consider, however, that pairing two dystopian texts, as with any other strongly defined genre, can lead to candidates focusing on description of the dystopian worlds and how they function, again losing sight of the writers' methods.

As outlined last year, when delivering the teaching of the unit, centres took a range of approaches with more than one route to success. Very few candidates will be successful when left entirely to their own devices in terms of study; candidates at this age are unlikely to have enough experience of studying prose texts to be able to do so entirely without any intervention. However, the following approaches all worked well, and centres should be able to adapt to what best suits their candidates:

- Teaching both texts, but providing a range of tasks to ensure originality and independence in candidates' responses.
- Teaching one text and allowing candidates to study the other text independently. In this case, the most successful centres had clearly kept a close eye on their candidates' independent study, and had provided guidance in terms of how to go about this task and how to identify useful critical and contextual material.
- Providing a free choice of both texts, but within a carefully planned and supportive framework. Where centres had taken this approach, the most successful had clearly delivered a structured programme of study around the analysis of prose techniques and successful ways of addressing the five Assessment Objectives.

In centres where text combinations or task wordings varied across the sample, candidates were encouraged to recognise the multiple possible interpretations of the texts, and this gave them the best opportunities to produce thoughtful, independent responses.

## Task-setting

Much advice has been provided over the years regarding successful task-setting, but this continues to be a problem for many centres. Carefully crafted tasks provide a strong starting point for candidates and steer them in the direction of a literary argument. It is vital that candidates have the opportunity to pursue their own interests in this unit, but they will need assistance to produce appropriately worded tasks that will enable them to achieve their potential. Detailed guidance, in the form of Principal Moderator's reports and CPD materials, remains available on the WJEC Portal to assist centres with this work.

Although setting tasks early in the process can be a time-consuming activity, it is an essential one for centres seeking the best outcomes for their candidates. Consider the following examples of tasks taken from this series:

### Example 1

"In the worlds of these novels, the act of creating is filled with hubris: it destroys the creator and the created." In the light of this statement, compare and contrast the ways in which Shelley and Mc Ewan present 'playing God' in *Frankenstein* and *Atonement*.

### Example 2

'To what extent do *The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement* demonstrate the deterministic nature of social hierarchy in a post-war climate?'

Example 1 makes careful use of the term 'present' to remind candidates that it is the writers who create these characters and situations, in contrast to Example 2 where the word 'demonstrate' implies that the novels are illustrations of their contexts. Furthermore, the use of 'worlds of these novels' in the first example emphasises that real-life societies and those of the novels are not one and the same. Context is therefore kept in its place as an aspect that can shed light on the texts, rather than being the main focus of the response. In the first example, the candidate is given a clear focus – the concept of 'playing God' – which will help to produce a tightly-structured argument. In Example 2, apart from steering the candidate towards context, the focus is also much more vague. The critical statement used in Example 1, while by no means an essential component of a successful task, provides a springboard for argument; it is suitably challenging and allows for a range of views in response. With a number of different ideas being addressed in Example 2, there is a danger that the candidate will be drawn in different directions and will not produce a tightly argued response.

Without repeating what has been explored in considerable detail in previous Principal Moderator's Report, the following points are vital in ensuring a successful task-setting process. Centres should:

- avoid imposing a topic on the whole class and teaching the texts on the basis of one idea. Instead, teaching should allow for the interpretation of a range of different ideas in the texts. In a number of centres, although the tasks were worded differently all candidates were essentially writing about the same issue, for example the objectification of women or the restrictions of social class

- work with candidates to craft the task in a way that ensures a specifically literary focus; as noted in the 'Text selection and combination' section above, centres should avoid directing candidates towards an issue-based approach with tasks on racial inequality, class barriers, female repression and identity. These tend to encourage candidates to write solely about the issues, often treating the characters as though they were real people, and to lose sight of the writers' craft in presenting a range of nuanced ideas
- avoid ideas that are difficult to tackle in fiction. The concept of 'identity' has become increasingly popular in recent years, but in fiction is too challenging for all but the most accomplished candidates to define. Most candidates addressing such tasks treat the characters as though real, just as when writing about issues, and often begin to psychoanalyse them. As well as 'identity,' tasks focusing on 'agency' or the shaping of individual destiny' were increasingly popular; it was telling that many candidates did not use the authors' names beyond their opening paragraphs and treated the characters as though they were making their own decisions rather than being literary constructs.

It is important to note that there is no prescribed way to word a task for this unit and a number of different approaches can be equally successful within one centre. In the past WJEC has suggested that one way of setting up an argument for candidates is to use a contentious statement as part of the task. As in Example 1, above, this can be an effective approach and it has been pleasing again this year to see this method used well. To be useful to candidates, this statement must provide a view of the texts. Increasingly, centres are adopting this structure but making use of generalised philosophical or sociological statements that are not specifically about the texts nor even about literary conventions. Statements such as Foucault's 'Power is immanent' or Judith Butler's 'Masculine and feminine roles are not biologically fixed' provide stimulating topics for discussion, but will take candidates away from study of the texts as works of literature. Statements allowing for no argument at all, such as 'both novels portray a society built on oppression' were also unhelpful.

### **Careful use of online resources**

Previous reports have highlighted the potential pitfalls for candidates in over-reliance on online material, in particular from study guides. For some, these can become a replacement for close reading of the texts and their commentary style can lead candidates into thinking that this is what constitutes close literary analysis. Advice from previous reports will not be repeated here, but it is worth noting this year a new challenge for centres in the shape of AI as a tool available to candidates. Perhaps in future this will prove a useful addition to other methods of research available to candidates, but in the current series moderators found a number of cases of candidates relying heavily on AI to support their writing in a way that was not helpful to them. This often resulted in repetitive writing, a lack of textual support and the prevalence of certain words and expressions across responses from different centres. Good practice was seen where teachers had identified this and had asked their candidates to acknowledge the use of ChatGPT, for example, within their work, but centres will need to be alert to their candidates' use of AI if we are to see original and well-crafted responses in the future.

### **Addressing the AOs within the response**

The most successful centres and candidates understand that this unit begins with thorough knowledge and understanding of the texts as a result of close reading. Most centres will be teaching a range of candidates of different abilities, with some being more enthusiastic readers than others. Whatever methods centres use to encourage wider reading on the part of their candidates, it must be emphasised again that those who have read a range of literary

fiction will have acquired an understanding of novelistic convention that will serve them well when studying their chosen texts. A successful response to AO1 begins with detailed planning of the candidate's argument. Moderators noted that the most effective responses showed an ability to focus closely on the task throughout. Candidates must remember that the recommended word count is 2,500-3,500 words; to produce a tightly-argued response they must be able to let go of what is not relevant to their task. Many candidates this year produced very generalised responses containing lots of ideas and very little connection to their stated task.

As in previous years, AO2 was the least secure element in many candidates' responses. Many more candidates now resort to a commentary style, with embedded quotation but without analysis, or to the assertion of ideas without textual support.

Moderators noted this year an increased tendency towards certainty, as though texts had one fixed meaning, with candidates making more use of verbs such as 'show,' 'display,' 'represent' or 'showcase' rather than the more literary 'suggest,' 'imply,' 'portray' or 'present.' 'Microanalysis' of individual words and phrases continued to be an issue; although there were many pleasing examples of candidates exploring wider prose techniques, these are becoming harder to find. It is important that candidates are able to consider effects and ideas across the whole of these substantial texts, rather than seeking to pin large amounts of meaning on to isolated words and phrases. Some candidates continued to focus on grammatical terms or on effects more relevant to poetry, such as alliteration or plosive sounds. Even though candidates have studied a novel at AS level, the most successful centres recognise that they will still need considerable reinforcement of their understanding of the novel form and its conventions. Encouraging candidates to make detailed notes, to plot character development and to identify patterns in language and imagery can all help to consolidate their understanding of the texts as carefully crafted works of art.

Perhaps understandably, given the observations above regarding task-setting, AO3 was often the element approached with most enthusiasm by the candidates. Most managed to include context relevant to their texts, while the most successful candidates were able to explore a range of contexts, including literary and artistic, and were able to make specific connection between the contexts and the reading or writing of their texts. Responses were most successful when candidates refrained from bringing in contextual detail until they had established a firmly literary focus to their argument.

Candidates on the whole seemed happy with their understanding of the requirements of AO4 and had gained much from the comparison of two challenging texts. Most were able to make suitable connections between the texts. The most successful approaches were those where candidates had gone beyond the simple 'similarly' or 'in contrast' and had shown a real ability to evaluate the effects of the writers' different choices.

Where candidates performed best in AO5, centres had guided them in identifying relevant critical material, rather than leaving candidates to their own devices. When the latter was the case, candidates often resorted to reader reviews or examples of 'critics' commenting on characters' behaviour or describing events in the texts, rather than those commenting on writers' methods. These proved to be less helpful for candidates when seeking to engage productively with other views.

Although many of the same problems arose this year as last, it was refreshing for moderators to see many fine examples of rigorous argument from candidates who had clearly engaged with their texts and gained much from their study.

## **Task marking**

### **Comments on approaches to internal marking**

The majority of moderation samples arrived on time and were efficiently prepared, which made the task of moderation far more straightforward. Where administrative problems arose, they were very similar to previous years and often involved the same centres, which highlighted the importance for centres of reading their individual reports.

Centres should ensure that they have included a printout of the sample list and a copy of the NEA checklist with their sample. The latter provides all the information necessary to ensure that the sample is presented appropriately.

Again this year, a small number of centres submitted work with incomplete coversheets (missing teacher/candidate signatures, marks or comments), coversheets completed in pencil rather than ink, responses not securely stapled together or responses with pages missing/in the wrong order. Moderators recognise the time required to compile the sample and many were admiring of the centres that had overcome considerable obstacles when completing this work. However, where any problems arise, it is always best to contact the Subject Officer for advice rather than to submit incomplete paperwork.

In a small number of cases, incorrect marks had been submitted on IAMIS. These were usually as a result of an addition error or lack of clarity over final marks following internal moderation. In some cases, marks had been transposed within the sample, resulting in a candidate being given another candidate's mark on IAMIS.

Where centres are part of consortia, a brief covering note to explain who has studied where can be helpful in clarifying the situation when candidates from different centres are entered in one sample.

Accurate assessment meant that centres were taking a realistic approach to their candidates' achievement, balancing strengths and shortcomings in their annotation. Detailed annotation, with use of AO markers accompanied by language from the band descriptors, helped centres to reach more accurate decisions. Centres, however, must be familiar with the standards as exemplified through the benchmark responses available on the WJEC website. Where problems were found with a centre's assessment, often these qualifying terms had been used where understanding of the standards was not secure and the work did not support this judgement. At times, the terms used on the response did not fit the mark given on the coversheet. Where possible, dual marking and/or internal moderation was helpful in ensuring secure assessment of candidates' work; when moderation has been undertaken in a centre, it is helpful to provide some annotation to convey how this has influenced the final decisions made and to ensure that final marks are clear. Ideally, any changes should be made on the response and before the final marks have been added to the coversheet. Moderators understand that dual marking is not always possible, especially for small centres. Making reference to the WJEC example essays mentioned above in centres' annotation can be helpful to justify assessment and to indicate understanding of the required standards.

At times, some issues regarding task-setting made accurate assessment difficult for centres. Where candidates had all responded to a single idea or issue, they often covered much of the same ground in their responses and used the same textual support throughout. This made it much harder for the candidates to show originality and for the centre to distinguish between the quality of different essays. In these cases, the rank order was often insecure.

Problems with the assessment of AO5 persisted this year, with a number of centres continuing to award AO5 marks for contextual citations. This resulted in inaccurate allocation of marks in these cases. Centres should make close reference to the benchmark folders on the WJEC website to assist centres in recognising the differences between AO3 and AO5. CPD materials also contain useful tasks that can be used with candidates to demonstrate how to use contextual and critical material productively.

Moderators were impressed by the many examples of good practice seen in the assessment of candidates' work, however, particularly where centres were responding positively to recommendations in the previous year's report. There were some excellent examples of meticulous assessment that balanced candidates' strengths and areas for development, as well as of rigorous internal moderation processes. While it was pleasing to see centres that had revised their approaches successfully this year, others continue to have their marks adjusted and should review their assessment procedures as a matter of urgency to avoid further disappointment for their candidates.

## Supporting you

### Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4292

Email: [gceenglish@wjec.co.uk](mailto:gceenglish@wjec.co.uk)

Qualification webpage: [English Literature AS/A Level](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

### CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

### WJEC Qualifications

As Wales' largest awarding body, WJEC supports its education community by providing trusted bilingual qualifications, specialist support, and reliable assessment to schools and colleges across the country. This allows our learners to reach their full potential.

With more than 70 years' experience, we are also amongst the leading providers in both England and Northern Ireland.



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