GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GCE (NEW)
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
AS/Advanced

SUMMER 2019

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2019

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

UNIT 1: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND CREATIVE WRITING

General Comments

In Unit 1, Candidates have two questions to answer: a comparative analysis of a poem and an unseen text and creative writing, which has three strands to it. Effective planning of time is essential and we are now seeing this being dealt with very effectively. Most candidates are answering every question on the exam paper and, in some cases, are easily meeting the rubric instruction to write approximately 400 words for 2(iii). In only a few cases this summer, candidates did not plan their time effectively and did not complete, or in some cases attempt, the comparison of their own writing. As a whole, advice given in previous reports has been passed on to candidates and timing is now less of a problem.

Technical accuracy and the quality of written expression is assessed in AO1 for Questions 1 and 2(iii) and in AO5 for Question 2(i) and (ii). Candidates are reminded on the exam paper that assessment will take into account the quality of written communication used in their answers. However, in many responses, written expression contained lapses, not only in key spellings but in sentence construction, punctuation use and sometimes in clarity of meaning.

It is vital that candidates are equipped with a wide-ranging set of technical terms before attempting this exam, in particular for Questions 1 and 2(iii). The best responses this summer used a wide range of technical terms confidently (AO1), explored approaches meaningfully (AO2), addressed the influence of contextual factors (AO3) and made thorough comparisons and contrasts between the texts (AO4). Weaker responses often struggled to use technical terms, with many using just one or two basic terms and instead taking a descriptive approach to the poem's meanings. Another characteristic of weaker responses was a difficulty in linking the approaches identified to the meanings in the texts for Question 1 or in their own writing for Question 2(iii). These candidates also failed to compare and contrast effectively. There are online CPD resources available on the WJEC website to assist with the teaching of terminology as well as frameworks for supporting comparative responses. It is vital that centres make full use of the resources on offer to best serve the interests of their candidates.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Comparative Analysis of Poetry and Unseen Text

Candidates had to write about the poem 'Spellbound' by Emily Brontë, taken from their anthology, and had a choice of unseen text; they could write either about an extract from a novel *The Famished Road* by Ben Okri (1991) or an extract from the television programme 'Man Versus Wild' by celebrity explorer Bear Grylls (2007). All three dealt with the presentation of hostile landscapes and candidates were asked to compare and contrast how they had been presented in the poem and one of the unseen texts.

There was a reasonably even distribution of responses to the unseen choices offered, with some choosing to use the novel extract as mirroring several aspects of Brontë's claustrophobic poem with a vulnerable narrator, and some preferring to consider the way that Grylls sensationalises and chooses to enter his hostile landscape for entertainment purposes.

On the whole, candidates handled the analysis of the poem well, identifying some key linguistic and literary features, with most choosing to focus on the feelings of the narrator in the hostile landscape shown in the opening lines, as well as considering the environment in 'Clouds beyond clouds above me, Wastes beyond wastes below', and dealing well with the possible meanings of the text. There was plenty of opportunity for candidates to embed context and offer contextual readings of the poem, interpreting its meaning as being a mother losing her baby on the moors, taken from the Gondal stories, or as Brontë's statement of her entrapment in a range of hostile factors related to her life and position as a woman. The consideration of contextual factors was most effective when those factors were accurate and precise; there was a rise this year in the number of erroneous contextual references, with some candidates confusing Brontë for Bradstreet and once referring to her as the sister of Dante Rossetti. Most candidates securely identified tone and attitude in the poem and demonstrated understanding of some of the subtler ideas in the poem. Similarly, on the whole candidates handled comparisons well, identifying some key connections between the texts. Many commented on the fact that despite their overall similarities in tone, Okri's landscape was peopled and full of strange masked figures, whereas Brontë's rural landscape is particularly empty of other people and silent. Productive links were also made to the unseen extract from Grylls' television narrative with many candidates identifying key points of differences between the texts, with most commenting on the personification used by Grylls to outline the danger of the jungle, 'The jungle would swallow you up', contrasting this to Brontë's unpeopled landscape and her acute psychological terror. Most candidates securely identified the audience and purpose for this spoken text and better responses made reference to its sensational aspects for entertainment.

Errors in the identification of terms was sometimes an issue here, as in Question 2(iii). Errors which occurred most frequently were the misidentification listing in the poem, with the present participle verb 'darkening' used on the first line often referred to as an adjective or adverb. There was some problem identifying word classes in all three texts, in particular a tendency to struggle with narrative voice and confusion over nouns and pronouns. Some candidates dealt very well with some challenging aspects of syntax in unseen texts, particularly noun phrases and modification in Text B, and this was pleasing to see, as they had obviously been very well prepared for the examination.

Section B: Creative Writing and Commentary

Q.2 (i)   Write an extract from a novel where a forest or jungle is described.

(ii)   Write an extract from a vlog which gives viewers advice on keeping safe and surviving in the wild.

As previous reports have stated, the key to doing well on this section relies on effective time management and planning in order that enough links and connections are embedded in the two written pieces so that pertinent connections can be made in 2(iii) at relative speed. Candidates needed to pay careful attention to genre, audience and purpose in the written tasks and should have made sure that they were producing the text type that they have been set. It would be useful for centres to reinforce to candidates that examiners are, for AO5, looking for evidence of awareness of genre, audience and purpose, as well as register and voice. Quality of written expression is also assessed under AO5.

Question 2(i) asked candidates to write in a genre, writing prose for novels, and register with which hopefully they were familiar. We read a range of secure and engaging responses, from those with plenty of descriptions of exotic landscapes to forests with a range of interesting creatures present.

There were plenty of mysterious and sinister jungle encounters with most concluding with a comment on the strange beauty of these often eerie places, no doubt influenced by Brontë in Section A. Some candidates chose unusual settings. The Garden of Eden worked particularly well and made for a mature description of it from Eve's perspective. Most contained a secure sense of audience and purpose and candidates showed themselves to be familiar with fiction writing, the more successful of which confidently crafted descriptions with original imagery and thoughtful angles on setting and character. Less successful were those whose responses contained many technical errors, responses where subject and verb disagreed, some which slipped unsuccessfully between past and present tense, and those where a first person voice became second person and struggled with even tone; equally, there were some candidates who failed to move beyond simply outlining some very general descriptions of jungles or forests.

Overall, the travel vlog task was slightly more problematic, with many candidates struggling to find the appropriate tenor and register for the spoken piece. This is a problem which has been noted in previous reports, and I would encourage candidates to practise a range of spoken text types to make sure they understand what is required of the genre. Most candidates used the first person narrative voice securely, and most were able to adopt the voice of a vlog host with some success. The more successful responses were able to use elements of speech to craft and shape the vlog and engage the audience with a lively, energetic tone ('Hi Guys!' was a common feature here), and some were genuinely imaginative in their use of what constituted 'advice'. Some candidates struggled with the vlog genre, and misread the question, writing a travel guide rather than a vlog spoken piece, so produced pieces very similar to their 2(i) response, flowery descriptions of a location with limited sense of audience and purpose.

(iii)   An analytical commentary

It was in responses to this question that candidates who had not managed their time effectively struggled. Often, over-long poetry responses and/or creative pieces tended to result in students not completing or, in some cases, even starting this question. The key to success here was in the strength of the links made between the two written pieces, and it is sensible to suggest to students that they should prepare and plan for these links by including similar and different features in their two pieces. Some were lost for what to compare and offered very general comments, often venturing into evaluation of what was and what was not successful in their written pieces, which is not necessary. Whilst there are a range of approaches that could be taken in this question, those who opted to analyse linguistic and literary features of both pieces concurrently did well, as did those who used the frameworks of language loosely to structure their connections, but who moved beyond it in order to improve the quality of their links. Whilst terminology (AO1) is worth only 5 marks here, it seems the use of a range of terms is crucial to their analysis of language choice and impacts too (AO2, 10 marks), which in turn has an impact on the quality of links (AO4, 15 marks).

There is a need for candidates to get straight to linguistic and literary analysis in their commentary. Long introductions evaluating their general choices, outlining where the rest of their novel would go, or considering intended audiences for their vlog with no textual analysis, will fail to hit the assessment objectives soon enough.

Summary of key points

Section A

Successful responses:

- avoided lengthy introductions which rewrote the examiner's rubric or gave unnecessary details about intended audience and purpose
- used a range of terms from across the language framework accurately and applied them sensitively in order to comment on meanings
- used the question 'how hostile landscapes are presented' as a focus throughout the response, dividing different aspects of their presentation between paragraphs
- embedded references to contextual factors throughout their response, making these references relevant and central to readings of the poem
- adopted a comparative approach, either moving between the two texts throughout the response, or dealing with the poem first before moving on to the unseen text and then making connections
- ensured even coverage of the poem (and the unseen text of choice), considering material from the whole text, rather than solely focusing on openings and endings.

Areas for improvement:

- Avoid long opening paragraphs which establish general audience and purpose of texts. A brief introduction is best, outlining key attitudes to the topic in hand (in this case the presentation of hostile landscapes) and then candidates should move on to close textual analysis, avoiding often spurious comments on intended audiences.
- Keep track of the use of a range of terminology from integrated study. To demonstrate 'clear evidence' of terminology, candidates need to make sure that they aren't using the same few terms time and time again.
- Explore connections between texts in a range of ways; compare the presentation of hostile landscapes through content, through technical terms and features. Offer nuanced and detailed connections which consider that whilst two texts might be broadly similar in their presentation, there are still key differences in tone and attitude.

Section B

Successful responses:

- demonstrated a secure awareness of genre, audience and purpose in 2i and 2ii
- built in a range of features in both creative tasks in order to compare them in the commentary 2iii
- wrote with a high degree of technical accuracy in all three tasks, making sure that spellings, punctuation and organisation of material was secure
- read the task carefully, writing an extract and an introduction rather than a whole text for 2(ii).

Areas for improvement:

- Section B, Question 2(iii) responses need to comment on and explore connections between written pieces thoughtfully and this is best done when candidates embed into and then comment on a range of linguistic and literary terms.
- Comparisons are key to Question 2(ii), and responses needed to do more than just comment on one written piece and then another.
- Length of responses to 2(i) and 2(ii). Exceeding suggested word length is self-penalising as it leads to timing problems with 2(iii).

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UNIT 2: DRAMA AND NON-LITERARY TEXTS

General Comments

It was pleasing again this year to read such a high number of responses which engaged with the texts and questions, clearly identifying the ability of candidates to write about texts with maturity and accuracy. The range of questions available to candidates enabled them to answer with confidence and there were many excellent responses. In what is a time-pressured and content-heavy examination, it is always pleasing to be reminded of what so many candidates are capable of producing. Centres are to be congratulated in the way they have worked with candidates in preparing them for this examination, and it was clear to examiners that much timed practice had been undertaken, as fewer incomplete responses were seen this year. If timed work is not undertaken as a central aspect of preparation for this examination, candidates are likely to spend too much time answering the shorter tariff question, and certainly this was an aspect of responses from previous cohorts. The importance of argument and organisation of responses has been highlighted as an essential aspect of **AO1** marks, and those candidates who produced work which was planned and logical were rewarded.

As the specification has continued, it is also very pleasing to note how much more comfortable candidates (and by definition their teachers) are in discussing context. Rarely do we now see the use of 'bolt-on' context in either of the responses where it is required. Instead, candidates appear far more accustomed to fully integrating contextual discussion as part of their analysis of meaning and language, and where they are able to wholly integrate their discussion of all of the AOs, they are enabling examiners to fully reward their work. There are still examples of highly generalised discussion and irrelevant biographical information, but these are fewer than in previous series, and in some cases there were examples of original and engaging interpretations. It is clear that there are centres which thoroughly prepare their candidates for this examination, enabling them to respond to any of the possible questions which may be asked on their texts, through using their knowledge and adapting to the specifics of the questions. These enabled candidates to demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of the texts, with all of the questions being attempted. Candidates who consistently ensured their responses met and addressed all of the relevant Assessment Objectives, made it straightforward for examiners to reward their work.

Some of the same messages apply from the report last year. Most notable still, is the lack of **range** in linguistic and literary terminology, which limits the marks candidates could be awarded for AO1. This is most in evidence in the responses to the extract question in Section A. Again we had many candidates who simply identify stage directions and sentence mood which is not going to help them move up the band descriptors. There were also the usual errors with terminology, for example poetic terminology being applied to prose and drama texts, and perhaps more worryingly the inability in a few circumstances to differentiate between simile and metaphor. However, the most striking error this year occurred in Section A part (ii) questions. There was a clear increase in the number of rubric infringements this year, with numerous candidates wasting time discussing the extract from part (i) in their response to part (ii).

It is indicated on the examination itself that candidates are to refer to at least 'two *other* episodes' from the play. When they have already been rewarded for their discussion of the extract in the first question, they cannot duplicate this analysis in the second question, and examiners were unable to reward responses where this occurred. If candidates do this then it is effectively self-penalising. The question is designed to enable candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the whole play, and they must ensure that discussion of the linked extract is avoided. Candidates should also be reminded about the importance of basic technical accuracy and paragraphing, as this can have an impact on the cohesion and quality of their written response.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Post-1900 drama (open book)

The most popular text in this section was again *A Streetcar Named Desire* followed by *Kindertransport*. The increase in centres from last year studying *Amadeus* and *Shakespeare in Love* was mirrored this year.

This section consists of a choice of two two-part questions which address a specified extract (AO1 and AO2), and then an issue from the extract elsewhere in the whole play (AO1, AO2 and AO3). There was very little evidence of candidates wasting time discussing context in part (i) of the question, but there were still too many responses which were too long. For this question, two pages is ample space for them to track through and discuss language in detail. With three essays to write in 2 hours, this unit is time-sensitive, and candidates should spend time preparing themselves under timed conditions and writing to a certain length, even if they try this at home.

As stated, some candidates still discuss the extract from part (i), as an aspect of their response to part (ii) of the question, and the increased examples of this practice this year was alarming. As part of their preparation, candidates could create multiple essay plans on a range of characters/themes, based on different episodes from the play. This should help to ensure that they have a wide enough scope from which to draw when they sit the examination, and should help them to avoid limiting their response, and ultimately their mark, in the examination. Candidates are rewarded under AO1 for their selection of episodes, and they should be ones which highlight and exemplify how this theme or idea is presented elsewhere in the play.

Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar named Desire*

This continues to be a text which candidates enjoy. Question 2 was more popular with candidates for this text. Due to the pivotal nature of the extract this was perhaps unsurprising, and candidates were able to respond with confidence regarding how dramatic tension is created. The very best responses had a clear focus on stagecraft and linked this to their analysis of language, and the concept of male dominance in the second part of the questions was approached with vigour regarding context. Those who responded to question 1 were able to highlight the clear differences between their characters and how Williams presented them. In the second part of this question however, some candidates didn't fully engage with the notion of 'tragic hero' which could have led them into utilising contextual information far more productively.

Peter Shaffer: *Amadeus*

Both questions provided candidates with the opportunity to discuss the central protagonists in detail, with Question 3 being slightly more popular, perhaps due to the extract which highlights Salieri's intentions at the start of the play.

Some struggled with the notion of religion as a topic, but others were fluent and wise in their selection of Salieri's altering relationship with God throughout the play. The second part of Question 4 really enabled candidates to shine in their discussion of deception in the whole play. There were some very engaging responses which linked this theme to corruption in the Viennese Court and how Salieri and Rosenberg abused their positions of authority to influence outcomes. Where this text is studied, responses demonstrate that there is a keen understanding of the intrigue and manipulation evident in society of the time, and there are frequently fluent and perceptive essays in evidence.

Marc Norman and Tom Stoppard: *Shakespeare in Love*

This text continues to be popular with centres and candidates clearly enjoy studying this screenplay. Of the two questions, 6 was far more popular. There were some excellent responses on the extract, with many discussing the power play in evidence. Interesting discussion of the Queen was apparent and many candidates discussed her authority and wit when talking to Wessex. Analysis of female power elsewhere in the play tended to focus on Viola and her attempts to break female stereotypes, but many recognised that ultimately she was at the mercy of the decisions of male characters. The presentation of the Queen elsewhere in the play was also a useful approach, tracking how her character developed. There were also many engaged and thoughtful essays which included a discussion of Rosaline and her attempts to manipulate the men she encounters. In this respect, if candidates were able to usefully integrate their discussion of Rosaline as an example of female power, then examiners were able to reward their work.

Edward Albee: *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

Very few responses were seen on this text.

Diane Samuels: *Kindertransport*

Candidates were fairly evenly split in their responses to the questions. In Question 9, there was interesting discussion regarding the relationship between Evelyn and Faith, especially the calmness of Evelyn whilst facing a very challenging situation. This led many neatly into a discussion of truth elsewhere in the play, with most candidates suitably selecting episodes from both time sections. There was engagement with Helga and Eva as a child and how the truth had impacted on their relationship towards the end of the play, which some candidates thoughtfully compared to Evelyn's relationship with Lil, and explored the difference between truths the 'mothers' told. In Question 10, the majority of candidates were able to write about the mocking attitude of the Postman towards Eva and his stereotypical opinions, and connected this with their comments on Eva's innocence and vulnerability. Responses to the impact of war elsewhere in the play had a clear focus on issues relating to separation, and how this can have an impact on relationships.

Section B: Non-Literary text study (open book)

In this section, *In Cold Blood* and *Once in a House on Fire* were the most popular texts, but responses were seen on all of the texts on the specification. Candidates are required to select one essay question from a choice of two, and in their response demonstrate knowledge of the whole text, whilst addressing **AO1, AO2 and AO3.** It is therefore essential, as with Section A part (ii), that context is an integral aspect of their discussion, and sweeping generalisations should be avoided. There is also a tendency in this section, for candidates to slip into narrative, or simple description of the events in the text which relate to the question. Again, unless discussion is grounded in analysis of language, then candidates are self-penalising.

Candidates who perform well in this section tend to follow a fairly basic structure of overview, three to four episodes from the whole text, followed by a brief conclusion, ensuring that they have integrated all of the AOs throughout their response, and there were many examples of this. Occasionally, examiners noted that candidates would refer to context in their overview and make useful comments, but then treat it with scant regard elsewhere in their answer. As mentioned in the report on previous occasions, context (AO3) is heavily weighted in this section, and whilst there has been an improvement in its use in Section A, some candidates still struggle to integrate it throughout their responses in Section B. Once again, examiners noted a number of responses which tried to encompass the whole text in their answers, and this prohibits candidates from discussing the language in any real detail, and leads them into a descriptive response which does not answer the question. Candidates should be encouraged to select three to four well-chosen episodes from their text, and spend some time considering **how** their selection helps them answer the question. In order to reach the top bands for AO2, candidates need to demonstrate sustained and perceptive analysis of language.

Andrea Ashworth: *Once in a House on Fire*

This text continues to be popular with centres and candidates. Of the two questions on offer, more candidates responded to the presentation of romantic relationships (Q12) rather than friendship (Q11). Responses to Question 12 unsurprisingly saw candidates predominantly focus on failed marriages to Peter and Terry, but a number also discussed Andrea's biological father. There was little discussion of successful or happy romantic relationships in the text, and whilst few and far between, this may have enabled candidates to offer some contrast to the rather bleak representation of romantic relationships elsewhere. There is a tendency with this text for a few candidates to make sweeping generalisations regarding context, so candidates should be reminded of the importance of being specific in future. Those who responded to Question 11 frequently discussed the influence of certain friends on Andrea, and how the friendship between her and her sisters developed and changed. There were some thoughtful responses which commented on those with an apparent lack of friends, such as the male characters, and the possible reasons behind this.

Truman Capote: *In Cold Blood*

Candidates continue to produce highly impressive work on this text, and it was again the most popular text on the paper. The majority of candidates opted to respond to Question 13 on family life, and wrote with engagement and interest. There were many examples of considered discussion of the Clutters and how, although being a perceived example of a perfect family, they in fact demonstrated multiple problems and issues which were sometimes kept behind closed doors. This led to many candidates making interesting contextual points on Bonnie and her post-partum depression, and Herb as breaking the stereotype of the typical male of the time. A number of candidates also linked their discussion of family life to the upbringing of both Perry and Dick, and how despite their clear differences, neither were able to avoid their life of crime. Those who were most successful then linked this to a contextual discussion of the nature of criminality. Others also commented on the Deweys and their shared household roles being uncharacteristic of the time. Those candidates who responded on education/learning commented on Perry's attempts to educate himself and the importance he places on this. There was also discussion of the influence of Willie-Jay on Perry and how ultimately Perry did not learn from his advice. Others discussed how both Perry and Dick learned about crime through experience and their time in penal institutions.

Dave Eggers: *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*

For this text, Question 15 was more popular than Question 16. His relationship with his mother is a key element of the first part of the text, but better responses made references to how he presents this throughout the memoir, especially his struggles with tracking down her ashes towards the end. There was also discussion of how she protected them from their father's violence and the overriding influence she had, not only on Eggers himself, but those around him. Those who responded to Question 16 on relationships between men and women commented on the relationship between his parents, but also some of his own failed attempts at romantic relationships. There was some effective and purposeful commentary on his relationship with his sister, and how this changed following the publication of his work.

Robert Minhinnick: *Watching the fire-eater*

Candidates engaged well with both of the questions for this text and there was greater evidence this year of selection from a wide range of chapters. However, perhaps due to its suitability for this set of questions, 'Rio de Journal' was still the most frequently referenced chapter, and whilst candidates usually discuss it with enthusiasm, it should not dominate responses to the detriment of other chapters. Question 17 asked candidates to discuss attitudes to change, and many topics were commented on, such as Minhinnick's attitude to environmental change. More effective responses however, combined this with a discussion of other topics, such as globalisation, enabling them to demonstrate a wider coverage of the text, and therefore further developing the range of their argument. Responses to Question 18 ranged from discussing Rio and the jungle, to Wales and America, but more effective responses were able to contextually link their discussion to how a sense of place reflected the society and culture of the time, or how world events had an impact on both people and place.

George Orwell: *Down and Out in Paris and London*

Candidates were asked to respond to either how Orwell creates a sense of hope (Q19) or the presentation of pride (Q20). Responses to a sense of hope relied heavily on the concept of friendship, and how even in the darkest moments/environments, Orwell was able to forge what seemed like real connections. Ideas of always having a dream or belief in something better were central aspects of some responses, but others focussed on the idea of finding honour in all aspects of life regardless of the situation, such as his time as a 'plongeur'. All of these approaches were acceptable. When discussing the presentation of pride, many candidates commented on the success Orwell felt at having survived or even endured some of the circumstances in which he found himself, and his almost daily struggle to survive, citing numerous examples from throughout the text. Others also commented on the pride he felt for the achievements of others, for example his admiration for Bozo's work.

Summary of key points

Section A

Candidates should:

- only discuss the set extract in part (i)
- avoid discussing the set extract in part (ii)
- ensure that linguistic and literary terminology must go beyond identification of sentence mood

- remember that part (ii) carries more marks than part (i) and this should dictate the amount of time spent on each essay
- specify the terminology being discussed.

Section B

Candidates should:

- spend a short period of time selecting the three to four most effective episodes for discussion
- avoid narrating/describing the text, follow S/E/A and include at least one term for each quotation
- ensure that context is used in a meaningful and productive manner, and is referenced throughout the response
- aim for sufficient coverage of the whole text without feeling it necessary to discuss everything.

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UNIT 3: SHAKESPEARE

General Comments

This unit requires candidates to respond to a given extract on the set Shakespeare play they have studied and to write one essay (from a choice of two) on the same Shakespeare play. All set texts were attempted. *King Lear* remains the most popular Shakespeare text studied. Once again, it was clear that many centres had thoroughly prepared candidates for this examination. Examiners were impressed by the insightful and perceptive responses elicited to the set questions. For both Section A and Section B, the strongest responses combined the evaluation of literary and linguistic features (AO1) with detailed analysis of how meaning was created (AO2). For Section B, where candidates had to provide relevant contextual detail (AO3), the best responses saw this context being *applied* meaningfully to the Shakespeare text. It was pleasing to note that the use of 'bolt-on' context was less widespread than the previous year.

As observed in last year's report, given the AO1 weighting for both Section A and Section B on this paper, the teaching of terminology needs to remain at the forefront of teaching for this unit. Candidates need to be reminded that discussion of a range of literary and linguistic terminology is essential in an integrated course.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Extract Analysis

For Section A, candidates are required to respond to an extract on the set text they have studied. This extract is printed on the paper itself. The advice is to spend 45 minutes responding to Section A. Responses were seen on all the texts on the specification, with *King Lear* being by far the most popular.

Some of the same messages apply from the report last year. Candidates need to be reminded of the importance of reading the set question and shaping their response to address the requirements of the question asked. Although candidates are free to select detail from within the extract itself, examiners expect to see **coverage of the whole extract**. The best responses provided sustained analysis of the extract itself, covering a range of points and exploring language/meaning in detail. Responses which only referred to part of the extract were self-penalising. Once again, the length of candidates' responses varied greatly. Under-developed responses that were a side to a side and half rarely scored well as they failed to cover the extract in sufficient depth. Some candidates digressed from the extract and were keen to show examiner's their knowledge of the rest of the text. They provided detail that was often completely irrelevant at the expense of close focused analysis of the set extract itself.   It is worth reminding candidates that they must focus on discussing the specified extract

Given the AO1 weighting for this question, examiners expect to see a range of literary and linguistic terms being correctly identified.   As the extract is printed on the examination

paper, Section A is a key opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of terminology. Once again, the best responses saw a wide range of terminology being confidently applied and used to illuminate candidates' readings of the text. There were still, however, some candidates who did not use any terminology at all and given that this examination is taken at the end of a two-year English Language and Literature course, this was disappointing to see

As observed in last year's report, candidates must be encouraged to use specific terminology for each quotation they cite. There were still too many occasions when candidates cited a quotation without specifically identifying the term they were analysing (e.g. the possessive determiner 'Now, our joy, although our last and least'). Declaratives were still being misused in abundance with candidates citing part of the whole sentence as support. Some candidates did resort to feature spotting without linking the language to meaning tended but this was less widespread than in previous years.

Context (AO3) is not explicitly assessed in Section A. As pointed out in last year's report, it is possible to credit contextual information if a candidate has used relevant detail to inform their reading (AO2) of the extract. However, there are still too many candidates including irrelevant contextual detail at the expense of close focused literary and linguistic analysis (AO1) when discussing meaning (AO2).

Antony and Cleopatra

Very few responses were seen. Candidates offered relevant observations on how Caesar's attitudes to Antony were displayed. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description rather than exploring how Caesar's attitudes were created and conveyed.

King Lear

There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare created dramatic tension at this point in the play. The very best responses explored how language/character/plot/staging were used to create dramatic tension. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description. Some candidates, however, ignored the question completely and discussed the presentation of Lear and Cordelia. There was also irrelevant context provided in response to this question, most notably about the sub-plot. Some candidates also made some tenuous links to audience reaction without fully exploring how dramatic tension was created.

Much Ado About Nothing

There were some very insightful responses on how Shakespeare created comedy at this point in the play. The very best responses explored how language/character/plot/staging were used to create comedy. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and demonstrated only basic awareness of the fact the scene was meant to be a source of humour and entertainment.

Othello

There were some very insightful responses exploring how Shakespeare created dramatic tension at this point in the play. The very best responses explored how language/character/plot/staging were used to create dramatic tension. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and became narrative.

The Tempest

Very few candidates attempted this question. This extract was well handled with several candidates making well-selected points about the presentation of Prospero. Less successful responses tended to lapse into description and were narrative driven.

Section B: Essay

For Section B, candidates need to produce one essay from a choice of two on the same text that they used for Section A. In answering their chosen essay title, candidates are expected to show wider knowledge of the text as a whole. It is acceptable for candidates to refer to a selection of key episodes in detail as long as they place them within the context of the whole text and they are relevant to the actual response. However, some candidates selected three key areas to write about with no coherent overview of the text and no coherent linking of the episodes. The selection of examples to support their argument also addresses AO1, as this assessment objective considers their line of argument and the organisation of their response.

Candidates should be encouraged to plan their work before they begin writing. The very best candidates shaped their response into a coherent and convincing argument.   Once again, some responses were too brief at 1-2 pages. On the other hand, essays that were very long/rambling tended to lapse into narrative and description and score poorly. There are still candidates who choose to ignore the question completely and write a 'pre-prepared essay'. This is clearly not advisable as often there was not enough focus on the set task.

In order to access AO, candidates needed to have prepared thoroughly and to have learned a sufficient number of relevant quotations. They needed to apply a range of literary and linguistic terms to access the marks available. Once again, there was clear evidence of candidates being extremely well-prepared. There were some outstanding responses which incorporated a range of sophisticated terminology. As with Section A, some candidates needed to be far more specific in identifying language precisely. Candidates also need to be reminded of the importance of quoting accurately from the play. Once again, there were many examples of students making quotations up which clearly could not be credited. Some candidates also spent a whole chunk of their essay (1-2 pages) discussing the extract which had been set for Section A, using the exact same terms and examples. This could not be credited as it had already been assessed for Section A. Given the wealth of material that candidates could draw upon from their set play, this was a very narrow approach and possibly an indication that the candidate had not prepared thoroughly enough.

Context (AO3) is clearly important in Section B. Overall, the majority of candidates did attempt to apply context meaningfully to their set text and used it with some purpose to support their argument. There are still some candidates who write introductions which include generalised context which had little relevance to the set task. The very best responses confidently embedded contextual detail to provide thoughtful interpretations of the play.

Antony and Cleopatra

There were a limited number of centres studying this text. Question 6 required candidates to discuss how Shakespeare uses the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra to present personal and political conflict. This resulted in some insightful readings of the text with very high-level analysis from the best candidates. Less successful responses tended to use a character-based approach which led to more descriptive responses. No responses were seen to Question 7.

King Lear

Question 8 – chaos and disorder – was a popular choice. Candidates selected a wide variety of detail from the play and those who constructed a clear argument provided competent responses. Some responses, however, tended to focus heavily on the extract set for Section A. These candidates merely repeated what they had already written and could not be credited. For candidates wishing to refer to Act 1 Scene 1 in their essay, there was a wealth of other material they could have selected. For example, better responses looked at Lear's interaction with Goneril and Regan prior to the set extract. Other candidates chose to look at Lear's entrance into the play and many candidates explored the initial conversation between Kent/Gloucester. Question 9 – Edmund – was also popular and candidates covered a wide range of points. There was clear engagement with the set question as candidates debated whether Edmund was a stereotypical villain or a victim of society.

Much Ado About Nothing

Question 10 asked candidates to consider Shakespeare's presentation of Beatrice as an unconventional female. Some candidates ignored the question completely and wrote descriptively about Beatrice. The best responses shaped a clear argument and considered the relevant contextual factors. Some candidates also meandered into discussing Hero and the role of women - a response they had possibly pre-prepared. Question 11 focused on male honour. Some responses were character driven and there were some candidates who chose to focus on a single character which was an extremely narrow approach. However, there were some insightful responses which covered a range of valid points and effectively used context to shape the argument.

Othello

Question 12 asked candidates to consider how Shakespeare used the relationship between Othello and Desdemona to present personal and social issues. The best responses shaped a clear argument and considered the relevant contextual factors. Some candidates ignored the question and wrote descriptively about Othello and Desdemona. Some candidates also focused solely on Othello – possibly a pre-planned response. Question 13 – reputation and honour – was a popular choice. Some responses were character driven and there were some candidates who chose to focus on a single character which was an extremely narrow approach. However, there were many insightful responses which covered a range of valid points and effectively used context to shape the argument.

The Tempest

Very few responses were seen on this play. Question 14 asked candidates to explore the concept of freedom. The best responses engaged with the quotation, providing a clear argument and embedding relevant contextual factors. Question 15 – Caliban - was the more popular choice. There were some competent responses which considered Caliban's function within the play. There was clear engagement with the set question as candidates debated whether Caliban was a victim of social injustice or a savage beast. Some candidates relied heavily on a narrative response and had a limited grasp of the function of the character within the play.

Summary of key points

Section A

- Read the question carefully and answer the question that has been set.
- Terminology must be wide-ranging and applied accurately.
- Candidates should refer to at least one term per cited example – this term should be specifically supported by the example.
- Avoid description/narration – candidates should be encouraged to adopt the SEA approach.
- Include a brief introductory sentence placing the extract in the context of the play.
- Avoid irrelevant contextual detail.
- Candidates need to demonstrate clear understanding of how dramatic tension/comedy is created (if that is the set question).
- Candidates need to analyse how meaning is created.

Section B

- Answer the set question.
- Avoid using the extract set for Section A.
- Responses need to be shaped into a coherent argument.
- Terminology needs to be wide-ranging and applied accurately.
- Candidates should refer to at least one term per cited example – this term should be specifically supported by the example.
- Candidates need to learn a range of quotations from the play and cite them accurately.
- Avoid description/narration – candidates should be encouraged to analyse how meaning is created and draw conclusions from their points.
- Candidates need to demonstrate understanding of the whole text.
- Centres should prepare their candidates with a wide and broad understanding of the social, political, historical and cultural context of their chosen text.
- Context should be meaningfully applied and embedded into the candidate's response.
- Centres should also encourage candidates to consider how their chosen texts can be interpreted in contemporary and modern societies.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2019

Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

UNIT 4: UNSEEN TEXTS AND PROSE STUDY

General Comments

There was clear evidence that centres and candidates have heeded advice given in 2017 and 2018. Timing between the two sections was usually well managed and there were fewer examples of disappointing marks caused by failing to address the double-weighted AOs, AO4 (comparisons) in Section A and AO3 (contextual factors) in Section B. Time has been well spent ensuring that the Assessment Objectives are thoroughly understood.

On the paper as a whole, the most important concern remains the range and quality of linguistic and literary analysis. On Section B, a further issue is the quality of contextual understanding, in terms of range, relevance and integration. This varies markedly between centres.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Comparative analysis of unseen texts

The three unprepared texts produced an enormous range of responses. At the top of the range there was remarkably perceptive work with fluent expression, firm organisation, meaningful links between the texts and confident analysis informed by purposeful application of a wide range of approaches, both literary and linguistic. Yet again, however, some candidates had apparently omitted the careful reading stage: they then struggled with meanings, producing flawed or superficial connections.

AO1
Use integrated linguistic and literary approaches
Apply terminology purposefully
Organise and write coherently

Planning, shaping and organisation
It is recommended that 10-15 minutes should be spent on **reading, re-reading and annotation**. This helps connections to emerge and also enables candidates to select the most relevant material for the question from the whole of each text, rather than concentrating only on the beginning.

Most candidates aimed to shape responses with **an introduction and a conclusion**. These can still cause concern when they are very generalised, simplistic or repetitive. The text descriptors should not be copied out but they are intended to be helpful and should be read attentively. For example, some observant use was made of Text B's subtitle, especially the phrase 'Lost Delights'. Candidates should be dissuaded from repeating all the titles, writers and dates in the introduction: they have been labelled A-C to save them having to do so. Very generalised comment (they are all about rail travel; they are similar in some ways and differ in others) wastes space. Openings announcing that the candidate intends to answer the question are also unhelpful.

It is usually unwise to start off with a sweeping similarity which often turns out to be untenable. Differences based on attitudes, purposes or the focus of the texts are generally more productive. Candidates can gain credit straight away for organisation (AO1), understanding (AO2) and connections (AO4). Useful introductions show evidence of thorough reading, focus on the question set and link the texts meaningfully.

A brief conclusion should be included to shape the response (AO1) rather than simply stopping. Too many, however still repeat earlier points or offer vague generalisations.

Using connections between texts as an organising principle is recommended. Responses built around meaningful similarities and differences are the most successful as they address the comparative element, which is double-weighted. Fewer now use a systematic framework approach as an essay plan. Starting with form and structure makes it difficult to focus on meanings and comparisons are likely to be superficial; responses organised in this way often delay focus on the more productive lexis and imagery until time is running out. The framework has phonology at the end which is far more useful when blended with other terms, rather than isolated. Ending with a section on phonology tends to produce flimsy analysis and tenuous links, even for able candidates.

Candidates should also be reminded to answer the question and to decide on starting points which will address it directly. Whatever the form of organisation used, meaning must always form the basis of any analysis.

Terminology and expression
The quality of expression, as ever, ranged from impressive to inadequate. This year's reminders are:

- Candidates should be dissuaded from using 'positive' and 'negative' which almost always produce simplification.
- Candidates should paragraph their writing, use topic sentences and aim for technical accuracy. Misspelling of characters' and writers' names and of key terminology all affect achievement on AO1. We expect titles to have capital letters, as they do on the examination paper. Time can be saved by referring to writers by their surnames i.e. Thomas, but not Edward.
- Starting a sentence with 'Similarly' or 'Contrastingly' does not make sense unless a clear connection is to follow. 'Moreover' and 'Furthermore' are very popular in some centres: they should be used to continue an argument or section of analysis, not to start a new one.

Common errors
Terminology problems include:

- **Connotation** is widely used incorrectly as is the verb to **connote**. 'Connotation' means an *additional* tone, idea or feeling suggested by a word or phrase, as well as its literal meaning. The expressions 'negative connotations' and 'positive connotations' should be discouraged.
- **Personification** refers to human qualities and activities which are not shared or performed by objects. 'The steam hissed.' is *not* personification: many things hiss, including steam.
- Different texts cannot **juxtapose**, which refers to the close placing of two elements *within* a text.
- **Lexical sets** are connected by *meaning* (not word class) and use of the term requires quotation of relevant words from the same **semantic field**. A lexical set must be *of* something e.g. a lexical set of the countryside in 'willows', 'grass', 'haycocks' and 'blackbird'.

- A list which includes at least one conjunction (often 'and') is **syndetic**. Where the term is used, at least one conjunction should be in the quotation.
- In 'I remember Adlestrop – The name' the punctuation mark is a **dash**, not a **hyphen**. Dashes separate; hyphens connect, as in 'state-of-the-art'.
- Writers **imply**; readers **infer**.

AO2
Show understanding of meanings
Show awareness of how meanings are created
Explore linguistic and literary features

Genre awareness
AO1 credit is given for accurate reference to poetic form (Text A) and spoken language features (Text C) but AO2 marks can only be gained where there is a relevant comment on meanings created. Most candidates acknowledged poetic form but there were many inaccurate comments. 'Adlestrop' was even referred to as a sonnet. There was good work on caesuras and enjambment where these features were supported by quotation and often combined with other points about syntax and lexical choices. Responses which focussed swiftly on language combined with form, rather than describing poetic form in isolation were more successful. In responses where an opening section was devoted to 'form and structure', focus on the question was often lost, however. It is difficult to *compare* forms.

At the top of the range, candidates made some purposeful use of both poetic and spoken features. Lower down, some failed to acknowledge that Text A was a poem or that Text C was spoken. Text B, which is clearly non-fiction, was often said to be a novel. In some centres, candidates have evidently been advised to include audience and purpose. These are valid considerations and can show awareness of genre differences. They can be rewarded on this paper as part of a comparison or contrast and are most successful when linked to analysis of language features. For example the purposes of Text C included warning and advice as well as information. Candidates often chose to discuss 'the jabbing and jostling and jam-packing' where stressed syllables are combined with syndetic listing of alliterated dynamic verbs.

Quality of analysis: selecting approaches
This year, there were several thoughtful and a few highly perceptive essays on the unseen texts. In some centres, candidates show confidence in selecting a range of stylistic features and skill in drawing out meanings. One principle for selection involves focus on the question, choosing features where discussion will explain how train travel is presented. This requires **the whole text** to be read and re-read carefully. Problems occur where part of the text, usually the beginning, is the sole focus and there is no clear overview. For example, those who dealt only with the first two stanzas of 'Adlestrop' and missed the wider perspective, sometimes produced narrow and repetitive readings of the poem: rail travel was lonely, boring and unpopular. Some thought that Adlestrop was a train rather than a place and very few understood 'Unwontedly' but this did not prevent a credible reading if they recognised the importance of location rather than travel and discussed what could be seen and heard from the train, rather than stopping at 'the bare platform' in stanza 2. As for Text B, those who missed the central idea of the old being preferable to the new, which did not become obvious until the fourth paragraph, struggled to make accurate comments. Where a clear understanding of the text's main messages has not been reached, we see words and phrases being lifted from the surface of the text often without internal context or any accurate idea of their significance.

When preparing for this section, Candidates should be encouraged to practise selecting a range of literary and linguistic features from different areas of the framework. Some concentrate far too much on one particular approach at the expense of many other productive areas. In a few centres, the over-interpretation of **phonological effects** seems to have been encouraged. Many assertions about the impact of alliteration, sibilance or fricatives are entirely unconvincing and prone to error. **Word class labels** are difficult to master and easy to get wrong. It would be possible to attach word class labels to every word on the page, so selecting the most significant is essential. It is rarely useful to specify the class of each word in a quotation but a few centres seem to have encouraged this. Pointing out **declaratives** can be useful e.g. the simple declaratives when the train stops at Adlestrop. But as declarative is the most common sentence mood, the term should be used sparingly, especially as examples given are often not full sentences and therefore inaccurate.

AO4
Explore connections across texts
Identify similarities and differences
Discuss reasons for these

Again, thorough reading is very important. Basic misreading of one text makes it difficult to achieve well on AO4 as well as AO2 because attempted links will be flawed.

Useful starting points for the presentation of rail travel included: quiet v. busy stations; nostalgia in Texts A and B; nostalgia v. practicality; purposes (e.g. to reminisce; to complain; to advise); nature v. man-made; the quality of the travel experience. Successful links follow a topic sentence with evidence for differences or similarities, between two texts or all three. Most candidates understand the requirement to use comparative language such as 'Likewise', 'On the other hand', 'Both' rather than just talking about each text in turn. Connections led by technique e.g. lexical sets, pronoun address can be successful when the focus is on the question and the creation of meanings. Looking for a particular feature can lead to narrow analysis which is more likely to be superficial if it does not start with meaning.

Section B

Most candidates now understand that the 'open book' opportunity requires them to select textual evidence from relevant episodes. A thorough knowledge of the text enables brisk and effective selection which might not mean starting at the beginning of the novel. Linguistic and literary terms need to be used to analyse material which will address the question. It is important to have a clear plan and the most successful responses offered a convincing argument. However, a significant minority still gave descriptive outlines of their chosen topic, drifted away from the question or lapsed into story-telling.

There were few centres this year where the inclusion of contextual factors was overlooked or added as an afterthought. However, the range of contextual factors and the quality of their integration varied markedly between centres.

The most common error (again) was 'a women'.

Texts and questions

The Handmaid's Tale was very popular, along with *The Color Purple. Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was also quite popular. There were some responses on *Great Expectations* but none on *Emma.*

By far the most popular question was on relationships between female characters, especially with those who had studied Atwood or Walker. Where a quotation is attached to the question, candidates may choose to use or ignore it: many found 'Woman is woman's natural ally' a useful starting point. Many of the strongest Section B responses this year were on this topic. The most common problem with this question was when the 'relationships' element was forgotten and the focus shifted to individual women. The question on settings was often tackled well by those who had studied Dickens or Hardy. There were also a few interesting responses on the closing section, notably on Atwood's 'Historical Notes'.

Planning and Organisation
The skills required here are rather different from those used in Section A because there is much more material to choose from. Successful candidates knew exactly where to find key episodes; others adopted a chronological approach or struggled with poorly chosen material. Thorough knowledge of the novel is essential for effective and relevant selection. Recommendations for shaping the response vary according to the text and the question. Sometimes a chronological approach will work well e.g. the influence of money in Pip's life; Celie's relationships with female characters; significant settings in *Tess.* However, those writing about female relationships in *The Handmaid's Tale* often did well when they followed a particular relationship through the novel e.g. the Handmaids with each other, Offred and Moira or Offred and Serena Joy.

Examiners are looking for a clear argument (AO1) which addresses the chosen topic (AO2) and integrates a range of contextual factors (AO3). **Introductions** should indicate a direction for the response with focus on the question and as AO3 is double weighted, it is advisable to involve contextual factors from the start. In many centres, introductions routinely include e.g. 'dystopian', 'epistolary' or 'Bildungsroman', according to the text but for many candidates these seemed to be just labels. Some, however were able to relate genre to topic e.g. 'Although women might be natural allies, true relationships are difficult in the dystopian world of Gilead whose regime relies on fostering suspicion, division and paranoia.' **Conclusions** need not be lengthy and should give a clear overview of the question, without repeating points made earlier.

AO1 and AO2
In most centres, candidates have clearly been encouraged to use a variety of analytical approaches. Literary techniques have been thoroughly discussed and revised, so that the focus is kept on linguistic **and** literary approaches. In others, AO1 evidence of study was limited to some desultory word-classing or alliteration spotting.

Useful linguistic approaches are partly determined by the novel studied. There were productive discussions of Celie's dialect linked contextually to the setting in the U.S. state of Georgia. In Atwood's novel, naming was used to discuss divisions between women. These features are so essential to the novels that they will be relevant to any question chosen.

Literary approaches were entirely absent from some essays. Elsewhere there was perceptive work on symbolism for example. In *The Color Purple* there was some observant analysis of Walker's use of domestic work, notably quilt-making but also nursing, food and Shug's idea for Folkspants to present female bonding. Others used the Gilead dress code to discuss state-imposed divisions between women.

AO3

Many centres have clearly been using the list of starting points which appears for each novel in the AO3 section of the Specimen Assessment Materials, as including a range of **contextual factors (AO3)** is essential for a respectable mark on Section B. Clearly, in some centres, this had been impressed upon candidates and reinforced until every response had at least some basic reference to context and the strongest featured integrated informed evaluation at every stage of the response. In some weaker responses, contextual points were mentioned at the beginning and then forgotten. In others there were numerous very brief starting points but without sufficient development to show a clear understanding of their relevance. Some candidates wedged contextual factors in at random, without clear links to the issues in the novel under discussion.

Taking *The Handmaid's Tale* as an example, at the top of the range there was an impressive range which included history, biography and critical opinions. The most successful responses might include references to : Atwood's life, work and remarks about the novel; other critics' views; historical and political events and movements, such as Nazi Germany and the New Right; feminist activism, especially in the 1980s; Christian fundamentalism and Puritan cultures; current issues which resonate with 21ˢᵗ Century readers; environmental issues and other dystopian works, notably *1984.* A note on genre: for many, 'dystopian' was mentioned in passing. In some centres, however, the generic conventions were more fully understood and applied to relevant features of the Gileadean regime.

Summary of key points

Section A

- Careful and thorough reading of the texts is essential.
- Introductions should start to answer the question. Advise candidates not to write out the text descriptors or the question.
- Practise using a wide range of terminology. Avoid too much emphasis on word classes or phonology.
- Encourage organisation based on linking texts through meanings, tone, purposes and attitudes with clear focus on the question.
- Discourage the use of 'positive' and 'negative'.

Section B

- Make sure that students are thoroughly aware of the AO weightings.
- Introduce contextual topics during teaching of the novel, as well as at the start.
- Encourage individual reading and research.
- Insist on introductions which link the topic with at least one contextual factor.
- Practise essay planning. Advise choosing at least three key episodes in the novel to analyse.
- Practise integrating different contextual factors with the analysis of key episodes in the novel.
- Encourage candidates to use a range of terminology, including literary terms.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

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UNIT 5: CRITICAL AND CREATIVE GENRE STUDY (NEA)

General Comments

This unit is internally assessed and externally moderated. It gives opportunities for learners to independently select an aspect of prose study that interests them and to study one text (chosen from a list in Appendix A of the specification) provided by WJEC within that genre. In addition, learners are given the opportunity to select wider reading to inform their studies in this unit and to reflect on the learning that has taken place. In reflecting on their studies, learners will then be required to produce original writing related to their chosen genre.

Centres are now familiar with the demands of the NEA as evidenced by the quality of work seen this year. However, this familiarity has brought with it a trend toward generosity in terms of assessment, particularly in the assessment of the Section A responses. This generosity was particularly noticeable, unsurprisingly, in Band 5. Whilst Band 5 is not reserved for perfection, the work should demonstrate confident and purposeful application of the relevant AOs for this Unit. Exemplar material must be used as a benchmark for centres' assessment in the next examination series as assessment this year was, on the whole, too generous.

Administration

Administration on this unit was greatly aided by centres' use of the Non-examination Assessment Checklist from the WJEC website. However, a number of centres did not supply this checklist this year. Where this was missing, administrative errors occurred. A minority of candidate and teacher signatures were missing from the cover sheets provided with folders. It is a requirement of the specification that all work is authenticated by both the teacher and the candidate. Final marks were unclear on some of the folders seen and there were a number of clerical errors this year with the totalling of marks.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Genre study

Work was seen from almost all of the genres on offer. Gothic, dystopia and romance remain the most popular genres but identity/the outsider and crime are increasing in popularity. A minority of candidates submitted work on life writing, travel, science fiction and adventure.

The majority of centres had given candidates access to a range of texts within one or two genres. Some centres had given candidates complete free choice of both genre and texts leading to an entirely independent approach to the Unit. A minority of centres had prescribed genres and texts offering their candidates limited independence in their study and leading to responses which were very similar in content. The genre study should provide candidates with the opportunity to explore an area of individual interest and to engage with challenging and interesting texts.

The majority of candidates chose texts from Appendix A in the specification, however a small number of candidates chose texts which were not specified such as Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'. Moderators saw many different texts within the genres selected by centres. As always, some texts proved particularly popular such as *1984, The Road* and *Brave New World* in the dystopia genre, *Frankenstein*, *Rebecca* and *The Woman in Black* in the Gothic genre and *Wuthering Heights*, *The Great Gatsby* and *Pride and Prejudice* in the romance genre.

Wider reading was generally appropriate and moderators saw an impressive range of texts. Centres should avoid texts which are examined elsewhere on the specification such as *Emma* and *The Handmaid's Tale,* both of which were used as wider reading again this year. Wider reading should also be of appropriate challenge for A Level study and this should be vetted by teachers before accepting a candidate's NEA proposal. A minority of candidates used inappropriate texts such as *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Salem's Lot* and *The Hobbit*. Bibliographies included with the work were very useful and demonstrated the care and attention that candidates had given to researching their chosen genre.

Task-setting is crucial in this Unit as, when done effectively, it guides candidates toward the demands of the relevant assessment objectives. Moderators saw a wide range of tasks again this year with the majority of centres offering candidates flexibility in selecting their area of focus allowing for an appropriate level of independent study. Gender and power tasks proved popular again this year, unsurprising as these tasks allow candidates to engage with context. Other tasks which worked well were the theme of relationships in dystopian texts, the villain in the Gothic genre and the presentation of victims in crime texts. Some centres provided a critical quotation in the task which candidates were required to engage with when constructing their argument. This approach worked well when candidates engaged with the quotation and used it to progress their argument. The strongest responses were based on tasks which allowed candidates to explore context whilst addressing the question.

AO1

AO1 addresses terminology but also academic register and organisation. Introductions and conclusions were an issue this year. Whilst, of course, there were many excellent examples of both there was a worrying trend for poorly constructed or entirely absent introductions and conclusions. Effective introductions should offer a clear overview of the argument as it applies to the specific texts being studied. Many candidates chose to use the introduction to offer a biographical overview of the writers or to offer a brief history of the genre itself. This information, if relevant to the question, is useful but should be incorporated into an appropriate section of the argument. Effective conclusions should tie together the candidates' final thoughts and offer their overall judgments regarding their essay focus within their chosen genre.

In terms of terminology, candidates are expected to apply a wide range of terminology to their analysis of quotations from the texts studied. As candidates can edit and draft the non-examination assessment, the expectation is that this range will draw from all aspects of the framework and should include both literary and linguistic approaches. In stronger responses, moderators saw candidates who applied a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology with confidence and precision. Where marks were awarded in Band 5, moderators expected to see candidates engage with language on both word and sentence level.

In a minority of centres, the range of terminology across the sample of work submitted was too narrow and in rare cases, was entirely absent. This heavily impacted candidates' access to both AO1 and AO2 marks as the identification of terminology should always be linked to meaning.

There was some misapplication of terminology such as vocative which was often used to describe any proper noun rather than for terms of direct address. A minority of candidates continue to apply terminology imprecisely, citing a word class i.e. verb and then proceeding to cite a phrase or sentence without specifically highlighting the verb. As this is an A2 unit, candidates are expected to show much more careful consideration of terminology than this.

AO2

AO2 continues to be an area of strength in the NEA. Across much of the work seen with candidates engaging well with they key ideas explored within their selected texts. The strongest responses tended to use the Statement/Evidence/Analysis (SEA) approach to very good effect, linking terminology to meaning to progress their arguments. Weaker responses tended to lapse into description, failing to provide adequate textual support for their points.

AO3

The double weighting of AO3 in Section A means that candidates must plan their responses with context at the forefront. This was the area in which moderators saw the most generosity in terms of assessment. Candidates should explore a range of contextual points but they must be relevant to the question. Sections of biographical or historical detail which are not relevant to the essay's focus should not be credited for AO3. The strongest responses dealt with the conventions of their chosen genre, and the typicality of their texts within it, in some detail. This was a very effective approach and allowed candidates to demonstrate the knowledge they had gained from critical and literary research. Reference to genre was, however, quite rare with many candidates not clearly exploring the impact of the genre on the issue being discussed. Candidates who had read a range of texts from different eras within their chosen genre were, perhaps, better equipped to address this as they were able to consider the changes that had taken place within the genre. Reference to reader responses and critical readings of the texts also proved very useful when used to illuminate the argument. Contextual points which were simply added on to the end of paragraphs also tended to be limiting as they were not fully integrated into the candidate's argument.

In order to meet the demands of AO4, candidates need to offer insightful and purposeful comparisons between their selected texts. Best practice was seen in centres where a comparative approach was adopted throughout and was signposted by comparative topic sentences. Fully integrated links between the core text and wider reading resulted in some very fruitful veins of argument. Weaker responses on AO4 tended to be characterised by a lack of comparisons through the body of the essay, instead leaving all comparisons to the introduction and conclusion or adopting a 'bolt on' approach in paragraphs. There was also a tendency toward generalised comments such as 'This texts also uses setting and isolation.' Simplistic statements such as this do not allow candidates to make productive connections. Links between texts must also be relevant to the question being attempted. There was generosity across much of the assessment of AO4 again this year.

Section B: Related creative writing

Nearly all candidates established a clear link between their genre study and their writing piece. The trend toward submission of short stories or novel openings continued this year. Moderators saw a great deal of very high-quality work which demonstrated that candidates had really engaged with their selected genres. Some candidates also showed some originality in the structure of their stories using appropriate techniques such as the multiple narrative voices or the epistolary form to the good effect. A minority of candidates submitted closing chapters this year. This is a really interesting task and some candidates produced very strong work showing understanding of how a narrative effectively closes.

In order to make the candidates intentions clear, a brief overview of the previous 'chapters' would be beneficial. Across much of the narrative writing seen, characterisation and setting were handled well but dialogue was less successful.

Other than narratives, moderators saw articles, monologues, blogs, reviews, travel writing, TED talks and speeches. The non-literary pieces were mixed in terms of success. Most showed a clear awareness of audience and purpose but a minority lacked clarity. A brief preface explaining the intended audience(s) and the proposed place of publication would be beneficial. Inappropriate tasks were in the minority this year, although moderators still saw work which was based on the characters of the genre study or which were a retelling of the core text from another character's perspective. This approach should be avoided as it is self-limiting and impacts upon flair and originality. Technical accuracy and the quality of written expression was generally very good. In some cases, technical errors marred the quality of the work. Thorough proof-reading and editing during the drafting process would allow candidates to craft more polished writing pieces.

Summary of key points

Section A

Candidates should:

- adopt a suitably academic reigster, avoiding the first person e.g. 'In this essay, I will…' (AO1)
- apply a wide range of literary and linguistic terminology (AO1)
- avoid a lack of precision when applying terminology e.g. referring to a verb but then quoting an entire sentence (AO1)
- clearly structure the argument including crafted introductions and conclusions (AO1)
- establish clear links between terminology and meaning - HOW do the identified literary and linguistic features create meaning/effect (AO2)
- link all points clearly back to the question being addressed (AO2)
- support all points with relevant evidence from the text (AO2)
- include a range of contextual detail e.g. literary, biographical, historical, social etc…
- make specific reference to the conventions of the chosen genre and how the selected texts fit into that genre (AO3)
- consider reader responses to the chosen texts (AO3)
- embed contextual detail into the argument (AO3)
- make sure to adopt a comparative approach from the outset and do not analyse texts separately (AO4)
- avoid generalised comparative statements (AO4)
- ensure that links are relevant to the question (AO4).

Section B

Candidates should:

- have clear links to the knowledge gained from the genre study
- select an appropriate writing form for their chosen content
- use a style which is appropriate for audience, form, genre and purpose
- produce original and engaging writing

- use language choices which reveal detailed knowledge of literary and linguistic features and their impact
- proof read work carefully to ensure a strong degree of technical accuracy, particularly in terms of punctuation of speech.

Conclusion

There was some excellent work in evidence again this year and it is clear that there is a great deal of good practice going on in preparing candidates for the NEA.