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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2022**

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:  
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### **Annual Statistical Report**

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# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE (NEW)

November 2022

### UNIT 1

#### General Comments

The November 2022 series saw an entry that was double the size of the equivalent series in 2021. Given the re-addition of the Group Discussion to the assessment, this clearly meant that centres had to work very hard to capture and submit performances before the November 5<sup>th</sup> deadline. The vast majority accomplished this, for which moderators were very grateful. Where the deadline was missed, it was usually because of the difficulties attached to assessing a small minority of candidates. The tenacity shown by centres in this area showed a commitment to giving candidates every opportunity to complete both tasks, rather than merely recording an absence for one of them. Whatever the circumstances, centres who maintained clear lines of communication with WJEC were much appreciated.

It was heartening to get the sense that many centres had used their previous reports as the foundation for assessment in the Autumn Term. Where concerns had been raised regarding such matters as the use of audio-only recordings and overly detailed notes, many had sought to address these matters. It is to be hoped that this trend continues and that centres continue to value the level of detail offered by moderators in response to the work submitted. As we have moved towards using numbers instead of names, in the interest of candidate confidentiality, the reports will require a little decoding in future. Centres should see the investment of extra time needed, in order to cross reference names and numbers, as being wholly worthwhile. Moderators soon adapted to the change. It should not be a barrier to the collaboration between centres and moderators, so that we ensure that candidates achieve fair marks for this unit.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Task 1: Individual Researched Presentation

The Individual Researched Presentations saw further progress in the way that centres are encouraging a pinpointing of topics, rather than a broad consideration of a WJEC theme. Centres are subscribing in greater number to the notion that the focus for a presentation can be an area for teacher/ candidate dialogue, so that controlled and considered choices are made in order to reflect individual interests. There was a sense that topics as diverse as wrestling, metal detecting and the importance of sleep were amongst many that had been given sharper focus because of the presence of gently managed research. This does not amount to overt teacher input; rather, it can simply be the approval of ideas at the outset of research, to avoid less engaging topics such as 'Liverpool FC' or 'social media', which can be too broad and general in scope.

It was a feature of the series that marks tended to cluster around the top of Band 3 and bottom of Band 4 for many centres. While some were mindful of the fact, there was still a tendency to over-reward candidates who were too reliant on scripted material. Sometimes this was a case of leaning too heavily on their notes, while other examples saw candidates reading from PowerPoints.

Such matters only result in two outcomes, namely that marks for centres are adjusted and the matter is referred to WJEC. Centres are reminded that, for the presentation to be deemed effective (Band 3) or better, candidates must demonstrate their verbal reasoning skills with a relatively high degree of independence. Notes must be there only to initiate ideas and/ or support them if they stumble. Scripts are not permitted.

Sometimes this issue does not present itself across all teaching groups in a centre. More robust internal standardisation would be the first step towards addressing this issue. Any adjustments should be captured on the WJEC record keeping mark sheet, the use of which has become a matter of course for most centres. Those who do not use this have to be contacted, as it often results in work not being verified by the teacher in charge. In more effective centres, teachers sometimes pair together for the assessment and this often leads to purposeful questioning of candidates at the end of presentations. These opportunities given to candidates are an essential aspect of the task. Questions invite more spontaneous thinking and encourage further reflection and exemplification. Beyond the assessment value, the questions are the simplest way of showing appreciation for the effort made to compose the presentation. It must be very deflating for some candidates to get to their end of their piece, only to be greeted with the click of an 'off' button on the recording equipment. Unfortunately, this is still not uncommon.

## Task 2: Responding and Interacting

Of the three options, space tourism and fast fashion proved to be the most popular. The most impressive responses came from candidates who had been given time to prepare for the discussion. By the time it came to the recording, they were ready to share thoughts without having to rely on overly prepared materials. Discussions were then able to flow with some natural fluency. Groups of three were pleasingly to the fore, thereby allowing candidates ample opportunity in the ten minutes allowed.

Less effective practice was seen when candidates were paired or placed in groups of four. While these situations were less commonplace than in previous series involving this task, they had the same effect of seeing marks adjusted for the candidates concerned. Weaker discussions also arose in situations where inadequate preparation time had been given to candidates. This resulted in a stilted reading of the stimulus materials and a limited expansion of ideas beyond that point. Candidates in this situation would have been better served by teachers allowing adequate time for research. At its most purposeful, this was clearly fuelled by channelling candidates' focus towards reputable websites and resources. Some of them marshalled statistics and case studies very effectively.

## Summary of key points

- These tasks should be subject to preparation and given prior thought, in much the same way as candidates are prepared for external assessment. While the IRPs are usually given due attention, there was a sense that the Group Discussions had rather taken some candidates by surprise. The tasks will remain in place for the next two series, so it is to be hoped that teachers can guide their classes so that they enter the final assessments with a range of ideas that are inspired by the stimulus materials issued by WJEC. These sheets are to be taken as the first stage of the candidates' thinking and can be used to structure investigations prior to discussions.

- For moderators to be satisfied that a centre has a secure sense of the standard for each band of attainment in Unit 1, a small portfolio of evidence is required. This amounts to the following items:
  - audio-visual recordings of each task
  - candidates' notes, as used in each recording
  - a record keeping mark sheet for each candidate, containing comments that give a clear sense of how marks have been arrived at
  - Without these items, it is not possible to get a clear sense of how candidates have performed; with them, praise can be given and the effort of all involved in the assessments duly appreciated. Moderators are keen to agree that the standard has been met and need a full set of evidence to do so.
- The return of the Group Discussion increases the importance of allowing candidates to be seen via recordings, not just heard. The third strand of each assessment band draws attention to the key skill of listening (Band 3 – “Listen closely and attentively”). It is easier to give this skill due credit if candidates are presented via audio-visual means. This skill can be quite a subtle feature when communicating. If a moderator can only define a candidate by their silence for long periods, it could be assumed that there is a degree of disengagement. As in all matters of capturing recordings, audio-visual removes any doubt.

Where centres anticipate any difficulty addressing these key points, they should contact the GCSE English team prior to the submission of samples. Contact with a moderator, giving some contextual details, can be made via an attachment uploaded with the sample in March. Such communication is all part of creating a secure and measured approach to this unit, so that moderators and centre-based staff work in tandem to assess candidates with confidence.

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

November 2022

### UNIT 2

#### General Comments

This paper was based on the theme of 'cycling'. Candidates were provided with five varied texts, including a mix of continuous and non-continuous writing. Reading question types were varied to allow for the assessment of a range of skills. Writing assessment was delivered by a proofreading question, followed by a choice of exposition or narration extended writing tasks. A question-by-question breakdown is provided below.

The topic of the question paper seemed generally well-received. Many seemed interested in the topic – for some there was clearly a personal interest in the activity of cycling, for others there seemed to be enthusiasm for the environmental/economic benefits of cycling or a pleasing level of support of Welsh sporting hero Geraint Thomas.

There was evidence of detailed and enthusiastic responses to this exam. The set texts and tasks appeared to be accessible, to some degree, to most candidates, and there were many detailed and enthusiastic answers. As ever, a few were unable or unwilling to engage with some of the materials. Whilst this was perhaps a larger proportion of the entry than we might see in the summer, it was still comprised of a small minority of candidates.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

This section will focus on candidate performance across each individual question.

#### Text A

This text was adapted from an information sheet written about the use of bicycles in the United Kingdom. The text provided information about the people considered 'core cyclists'. This was a non-continuous text which provided information through diagrams and non-continuous written information.

#### A1. How many people in the UK cycle at least once a month? [1]

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

The first question of the exam is intended to provide a straightforward introduction to the theme. This proved the case here and the correct answer of 5.2m people could be easily found at the top right of the text. The majority of candidates successfully located the correct answer. Incorrect answers only seemed to occur when candidates copied the first thing they saw in the text rather than trying to answer the question. Very few candidates did not attempt this question.

- A2. Name one of the other triathlon sports that cyclists participate in. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information*

This proved to be a very straightforward question. Candidates were required to locate the necessary information of either 'swimming' or 'running'. Very few proved unable to isolate the correct section of the text, which could be found in the blue box at the bottom left of the page. The information was provided as written text, but this was also aided by pictographic representations of each of the sports that feature in a triathlon.

- A3. What is meant when the text states that the ratio of cyclists by gender is 'more evenly split'? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question presented candidates with five multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that gave a correct explanation of the meaning of 'more evenly split'. Credible distractors were included, so it was essential that candidates read both the question and text carefully as clear engagement with meaning was required.

All of the incorrect answers were selected by candidates, although the fifth answer 'Almost a fifth of cyclists are females over 35 years' was the next most popular choice. The vast majority were able to accurately identify the correct answer to this question.

## **Text B**

This text was adapted from a cycling blog on the website of a national newspaper. The text contained information on the economic benefits of cycling to the UK.

- A4. Which one of the following statements is NOT correct? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question again presented candidates with five multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was incorrect. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the first statement suggested that the cycling industry 'employs three times as many people as the UK steel industry'. This was the correct answer as this statement was not true. The text clearly stated that the cycling industry employs 'twice as many people' as the UK steel industry. The cycling industry is worth 'three times more than the UK steel industry' which may have confused any candidates who were not reading carefully.

It was essential that candidates read both the question and text closely and were sure of what they were looking for. This task proved straightforward for most and success rates were high with well over 80% of candidates making the correct choice.

- A5. What evidence is given in the text to show that the cycling industry is beneficial to the UK? [4]**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

This question required candidates to focus carefully on what was being asked and extract and interpret relevant evidence. Candidates who made the most progress were able to pinpoint a range of different evidence answer the question. A list of indicative content was provided in the mark scheme and examiners were instructed to award a mark for each relevant evidence selection or reference, sensibly used, up to a total mark of four. Most candidates were able to make some progress here.

The barriers to success largely fell into two categories. Firstly, some candidates were not able to find a sufficient range of evidence to progress through the marks – perhaps stalling after one or two points. Secondly, some candidates were unable to sufficiently separate evidence and may have recorded unnecessarily large quotations that covered two or three of the points from the mark scheme. If candidates do not clearly separate their selected quotation, they are not demonstrating that they have understood which specific part of the evidence is relevant and therefore will struggle to make progress.

### **Text C**

This text was adapted from an infographic which provided information about the Tour de France 2018.

- A6. On which date did Tour de France 2018 start? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This was a straightforward question which most were able to answer with accuracy. Candidates were required to locate the detail that Tour de France 2018 started on July 7<sup>th</sup>. This information could be accessed from the yellow 'Grand Depart' call-out box in the middle of the page, or from the top row of the information table at the bottom left of the page.

Very few candidates failed to answer this question correctly. Where errors occurred, it was often due to a lack of specificity, for example stating only 'July' rather than giving an exact date.

- A7. How many kilometres did Stage 14 cover? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

The majority were able to answer this question with some accuracy. Some care was required though and a number of students did not locate the correct answer. The answer to this question was 188km and it could be found by finding Stage 14 in the first (black) column of the table and following that across to find the answer in the third (blue) column.

The most common incorrect answer was 181km and examiners assumed that this occurred where candidates had used the date column (yellow) and located the answer that was attached to 14 July.

This again demonstrates the importance of extreme care when reading and checking, even where at first sight a question might appear to be relatively straightforward.

**A8. Name one of the places where a rest day took place. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This location question required the candidates to locate one of the two places where a rest day took place during the 2018 Tour de France. Most candidates were able to clearly select either Carcassonne or Annecy, either of which was eligible for credit. The most common incorrect answer occurred when some candidates located Annecy but incorrectly combined it with Albertville which was a separate Stage start on the map. Those candidates who selected two possible answers in this way were not eligible for credit.

**Text D**

This text was a longer piece of continuous writing adapted from the autobiographical *The Tour According to G*. This text was written by 2018 Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas and dealt with some of his feelings about the Tour and his preparation for it.

**A9. Read the paragraph which begins ‘I’m the kid who dreamed about the tour...’ In this paragraph, how does Geraint Thomas create the impression that his triumph was a dream come true? [5]**

*This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within texts and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.*

This question was intended to provide challenge. Candidates were required to isolate a particular paragraph within the text and focus their comments solely on the information provided there. Most candidates were able to make some headway but there were relatively few who really engaged with subtleties of the writer’s technique or attempted to provide an analysis of how language was used. Overall, most candidates were able to make straightforward comments which made appropriate use of evidence. Some worked really hard to engage with their evidence selections and demonstrate understanding, if not analytical awareness.

A few candidates did prove able to offer more extensive focus on the writer’s use of contrast and/or the fantastical language used by Thomas in this paragraph, but perhaps as a result of this being a November series, these answers were less often seen.

One further point to raise with regard to this question, is that there were a number of candidates who seemed determined to look at the whole text rather than the paragraph they had been directed towards. It is important that instructions are read carefully; content from elsewhere in the text was not eligible for credit for this particular answer.

**A10. Synthesise what you learn about the Tour de France 2018 in Text C and Text D. [8]**

*This question tested the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text, interpret meaning and ideas in a text and to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse details.*

As ever, this question was intended to provide challenge and required candidates to range across two quite different texts and extract details that were specific to the Tour de France 2018. We anticipated that there might be some imbalance with many more details immediately available from Text C, but it was necessary for candidates to try to range across both texts and retrieve a range of details. Overall, attempt rates were pleasing and there was no shortage of effort from candidates. Many were able to really engage with the non-continuous format of Text C and demonstrated clear interpretative skill.

There were pleasingly few examples of candidates who did not use the correct texts to answer this question. The main barriers to success were when candidates either referred to only one text or gave only the briefest of nods to the second text. Clearly, for a synthesis task it is necessary that both texts are given reasonable consideration. The use of bullet points to present answers was still evident and proved to be problematic for some candidates. As the Principal Examiner report in the summer made clear, brief bullet-pointed lists that decontextualise the necessary information, often omitting key details, are not a desirable way to take shortcuts with this question. CPD feedback has always been clear about the use of bullet points, and this will have been made clear again during the recent rounds of exam feedback. Bullet points can be sensibly used on the summary question on Unit 3 or where they have been suggested in the answer booklet. For any other question types, the use of a bullet point format for answers may prove disadvantageous to candidates.

**Text E**

This text was a longer narrative text, adapted from the novel *August* by Gerard Woodward. The text depicted the scene of an accident between a cyclist and a motorist and the ensuing dialogue that takes place between the characters involved and a bystander. The text was more challenging in detail and structure than previous texts and candidates will have benefited from careful tracking of the development of the scene.

**A11. The writer describes Williams Vaughan's car as 'askew to the road'. What is meant by the word 'askew'? Tick (✓) the correct box. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and inference and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question presented candidates with four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that gave a correct explanation of the meaning of the phrase 'askew to the road'. Credible distractors were included, although, given the more difficult nature of this text, these were intended to be quite different in meaning from the correct answer, albeit responding to the same theme. For candidates who had read carefully and fully engaged with meaning there will have been few barriers to success.

All of the incorrect answers were selected by candidates, to a reasonably even degree. The majority chose the correct answer though and were able to demonstrate sensible contextual awareness.

**A12. What impressions does the writer create of William Vaughan? [10]**

*This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within challenging texts and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.*

This was the final higher tariff reading question on this examination paper. There was no shortage of effort from the candidates who attempted this question, and many were able to answer with reasonable clarity and focus. Many candidates appeared engaged by the reading material and had formed deservedly quite negative opinions towards the character of William Vaughan. As ever with this question type, those who were able to track the text carefully, select a range of evidence and demonstrate inferential skills and the ability to specifically analyse evidence will have achieved highly. It would be fair to say that most candidates were able to make some progress, but few demonstrated top Band skills. There was significant evidence of candidates who were prepared to work hard to discuss a range of impressions.

Examiners reported that this question seemed to be the reading question that was most likely to be missed out by candidates. For some this was possibly due to time constraints as this was the last text-based reading question and it seemed that the additional reading and writing was perhaps too much for some candidates. For a few, this may also have been as a result of the challenge provided by the more extended reading of Text E and this more challenging question type.

**Editing**

**A13. Alun was much more \_\_\_\_ (a) \_\_\_\_ about getting up on a Saturday morning for a bike \_\_\_\_ (b) \_\_\_\_ than he was during the rest of the week when he knew he had to go to work.**

(a) Circle the word below that best fits gap (a): [1]  
grumpy      bouncing      enthusiastic      excitable

(b) Circle the word below that best fits gap (b): [1]  
rack      pedal      descent      ride

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.*

This question tested whether a candidate could work out the appropriate word choices based on the context provided by the sentence. Four possible answers were provided for each space and candidates were required to choose the correct words.

There were reasonably high levels of success for this question. Word choice (a) perhaps proved the trickiest of the two spaces and candidates sometimes appeared unsure of the correct option with there being some degree of crossing out and changing of answers. Although 'enthusiastic' seemed to be chosen most often; both 'grumpy' and 'excitable' also seemed to be quite popular choices.

**A14. Tick (✓) the box of the sentence you think is grammatically correct. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.*

This question was presented as multiple-choice, and candidates needed to tick the sentence which they thought was grammatically correct. There was a very high success rate here – the highest of any of the multiple-choice questions – and this suggested that candidates were very well equipped to answer this type of question. Weight was added to this impression by the fact that there were very few candidates who tried to tick more than one box.

**A15. Read the text below and show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:**

1. The noise of cheers began to rise as the cyclists could be seen in the distance.
2. The crowds had assembled early at the top of the hill.
3. Many people were holding banners and flags.
4. The lead cyclist reached the summit of the hill and in seconds was gone again.
5. Some were even dressed in the brightly-coloured lycra of the team they supported.

(a) Which sentence should come **first** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]

(b) Which sentence should come **fifth** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at text level.*

The correct sequence was as follows:

1. The crowds had assembled early at the top of the hill.
2. Many people were holding banners and flags.
3. Some were even dressed in the brightly-coloured lycra of the team they supported.
4. The noise of cheers began to rise as the cyclists could be seen in the distance.
5. The lead cyclist reached the summit of the hill and in seconds was gone again.

Again, candidates seem to be on familiar territory with this question type. As ever, they needed to work out the order for all of the sentences to see which sentence fit best into the required locations – for this paper, they needed to identify the first and the last sentences.

There was some challenge here, and candidates needed to remember that they were looking for the order which works best out of all of the options. Most were able to determine at least one of the correct answers.

## SECTION B

### Proofreading

- B1. In this question, candidates were asked to read a short text, circle the given errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided for them. [5]**

*This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.*

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The text was presented as a paragraph about some of the health benefits of cycling. There was a variety of error types and candidates' responses were quite mixed with regard to which errors they were able to distinguish. Pleasingly though, most candidates seemed to be able to identify and correct the missing capital letter from the beginning of the last sentence.

As Principal Examiner reports have stated on numerous occasions, credit can only be given to corrections which do not add further errors to the text. All corrections must appear exactly as they would in the text. For example, the correction 'combined' had to begin with a lower-case letter and all of the letters in the word had to appear correctly. In some cases, we saw candidates write 'Combined' or 'combind' and whilst they may have accurately corrected the 'n' to an 'm' they had introduced further errors so were not eligible for a mark.

### Writing

- B2. For this task the specification states that 'one writing task' is to be chosen 'from a choice of two that could be either description, narration or exposition'. On this occasion, candidates were able to choose between: [35]**

**(a) Write an account of a time you achieved something you had worked hard for.**

**(b) 'Sport is good for everyone.'**

**Write an essay explaining the importance of sport, giving clear reasons and examples.**

Both writing tasks proved to be accessible to candidates and examiners reported reading some thoughtful and interesting work.

Task A was a narration writing task which encouraged candidates to draw upon their own experiences. Better writing tended to be quite focused in scope, allowing candidates the time to develop detail and fully complete their piece.

The content of these accounts was varied although there was a tendency towards sporting achievement – perhaps as a result of the theme of the paper. Examiners reported seeing some lovely examples of triumph on various sporting fields – with many embracing the opportunity to focus on adversity with regard to conditions, weather or the size and talent of opponents. Individual sports and activities also received some attention with dance, gymnastics and martial arts all featuring at some point.

With so many candidates resitting the qualification this November, achievement in relation to examination results was always likely to feature in responses to this question. Some wrote of really positive success in exams in the summer whilst others focused on the more recent hard work which had led them to the exam hall they were sitting in at the time of writing.

Task B was an exposition writing task and, as with the summer series, was probably the more popular option of the two tasks. Examiners reported seeing many responses that were written in pleasing detail. Whilst the cycling theme of the reading texts may have provided some useful supporting evidence for answers to this question, it was pleasing to see that very few candidates copied overwhelming chunks of text from Section A. Indeed, the generic nature of the task allowed candidates to write from points which they knew most about and it was clear that many were able to draw upon other areas of the curriculum to provide sensible detail about the physical, mental and personal benefits of sporting activity. Some also commented on the societal impact of sport – and although this was less regularly covered, we occasionally saw some thoughtful commentary on both the positives and negatives that sport can bring.

In answers to both B2 writing tasks, there was plenty of evidence of engagement and effort. Timing did not appear to be a significant issue with many candidates writing extensively in Section B as well as in the reading section. As ever, there was a minority of candidates who wrote very brief work or did not attempt to engage with the question.

Areas of concern were quite similar to those documented at the end of the summer series. Errors in written accuracy were particularly detrimental though and will have impeded the progress of many candidates in this area of the examination. Basic errors were prevalent in a significant number of written pieces and struggles with tense and agreement or an inability to punctuate will have limited the progress of quite a few candidates. In some cases, examiners reported that a candidate could write continuously for two or three sides of the examination booklet without them using a single full stop. Although most candidates were clearly able to sequence their writing, a lack of attention to clearly structured work and accurate paragraphing was also detrimental at times.

The summer report touched upon our concern with regard to the deterioration of candidates' handwriting. As expected, this continued to be something of an issue in written work produced in this series. In some cases, it was clear that unreadable handwriting was again affecting some candidates' access to marks. As previously stated, we do our absolute best to read what every candidate has written, but if we cannot identify what has been written then we cannot give credit for it. Please encourage candidates to form letters clearly, write at a size that is legible and leave adequate space between words.

## Summary of key points

- Candidates should think carefully about how long they spend on each question to allow themselves time to complete the whole examination paper.
- Candidates should read all questions extremely carefully to make sure they know what is being asked of them. Underlining key words to ensure understanding of a question's specific focus may be helpful.
- Candidates should write as legibly as possible in both reading and writing sections. They may deprive themselves of valuable marks if an examiner cannot read or follow what they have written.
- Candidates must make sure they are using basic punctuation such as full stops and capital letters accurately.

## GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE (NEW)

November 2022

### UNIT 3

#### General Comments

A question-by-question breakdown of the Unit 3 examination is provided below. The theme for this November's GCSE Unit 3 examination was 'sugar'.

For this examination, candidates were given five different texts based on the theme of the paper. A range of questions (differing in challenge and mark tariffs) were posed across the texts, and this was followed by two Writing tasks. Unlike the Unit 3 paper (June 22), this was not an adapted series. Candidates therefore had to complete BOTH writing tasks.

With a range of text and task types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical GCSE English Language examination. Prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being assessed or the positive achievement of outcomes. The texts provided readers with a wealth of details about sugar and candidates appeared to be genuinely engaged by the topic.

In terms of entry, this felt like a typical November resit cohort. While we saw a full range of abilities, those working in the higher Bands were less common. Candidates largely scored well on the lower tariff tasks, but many struggled to access a full range of marks on the more challenging reading questions. Many candidates produced particularly brief responses to the writing tasks and a number omitted at least one of the writing tasks.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### TEXT A

**A1. Which of the following statements best describes what sugar is? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Text A was a brief, continuous introductory text which provided information about sugar. A definition of sugar was provided alongside some basic facts about the calorific content of sugar. The first question was a straightforward multiple-choice task which most were able to answer with accuracy. Four distractors were included of which two were most popular. There were two answers containing the phrase "man-made", the second of which included the word 'thousands' and was the correct choice. The first option incorrectly used 'hundreds' and was therefore incorrect. Close reading of all the possible answers was required.

**A2. What is the most common type of sugar in the body? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This question was a straightforward location question, which many answered successfully. The correct answer was 'glucose' and candidates could gain credit for simply writing down this word – an explanatory sentence was not required. Although spelling errors are not penalised in a reading question, it is certainly good practice to encourage candidates to copy down spelling correctly when transferring them from a text as this serves them well when it comes to Section B.

**A3. How many calories can be found in one teaspoon of sugar? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Question 3 gave candidates another opportunity to use their location skills to find relevant evidence from the text. Candidates were asked to locate information pertaining to the number of calories in one teaspoon of sugar. The correct answer was 15 (calories) and the word 'calories' was not required in order to answer successfully, as it was implied in the question that the number given in an answer would relate to calories. A small number of candidates wrote down the only other number given in the text '4 grams' and were unsuccessful in this question. It is worth reminding candidates to ensure that the language used in their answer lines up with the language used in the question (i.e. calories rather than grams).

**TEXT B**

**A4. Which of the following statements best describes what is meant by the word 'addiction' in this text? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This question was the second multiple choice question of the paper and the first question to be included on Text B. Text B was a pictogram depicting the sugar addiction cycle. The word 'addiction' appeared a number of times across the text and was therefore the focus for this question. With one correct answer and four possible distractors, this was made slightly more challenging due to the fact that some of the credible distractors described the symptoms of addiction rather than its meaning. This added layer of complexity meant that some candidates were distracted by the fourth bullet point which commented on the use of 'medication'. The correct answer 'dependence on a particular substance or activity' was the second bullet point and a significant number of candidates performed well here.

**A5. Text B shows the sugar addiction cycle. Put these stages into order by numbering them to show what happens to your body during this cycle. [3]**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in synthesising information.*

The sequencing question required candidates to deduce the correct order of the sugar cycle. Candidates were given the third stage 'blood sugar levels fall rapidly' in the hope that it would help them to work out the rest of the sequence. A number of candidates were able to see that the first logical stage in the sugar cycle would be to 'eat sugar' and by eliminating the third bullet and using the phrase 'the cycle is repeated' given in 'hunger and cravings' many were able to deduce the correct sequence. This was quite a challenging question for those who tried to reorder the whole sequence and ignored the information they had been given already. As with all sequencing questions, close reading for clues was required and candidates had to reflect on their sequence before completing their final answers. A number of candidates did not follow the instructions given in the question and therefore rendered their answers incorrect.

## TEXT C

- A6. The text mentions that people choose to 'steer clear of fatty foods'. What is meant by this? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

Text C was taken from a science webpage to educate readers on the dangers of eating too much sugar. Candidates are familiar with questions that require them to use verbal reasoning skills in order to determine the meaning of a word or phrase. For this multiple-choice question (the final one on the paper) candidates were required to examine the phrase and then to select the closest option from a list of five possible answers. Those who engaged with the phrase in its entirety worked out that close focus on 'steer clear' would guide them to success. All possible answers began with 'food', so candidates had to examine the rest of each possible answer to determine which option was closest. Many were successful in their choice of option three, "food that should be avoided".

- A7. How does the writer try to persuade us that too much sugar is bad for our health? [8]**

*This question tested the ability to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.*

This question asked candidates to consider how the writer persuades us that 'too much sugar is bad for our health'. This was a familiar question type although there is still work to be done by some candidates in terms of approach. This type of question is one of the more challenging reading questions and requires candidates to demonstrate close reading and analytical skills.

Answering this type of question requires close task focus so that candidates are able to see exactly what is required in an answer. Being able to access the full range of marks hinges on this close reading. Although some lost focus when tackling this question, a number worked hard to remain on task. Those who were less successful often answered a generic question without the specific focus required or went off at a tangent, focusing more on the writer's methods than what was said. A small minority sought to answer a question about why they may choose to 'read on' and this is an approach that should be avoided.

Although these may seem like subtle lapses in focus, they can cause a candidate to be classified as ‘struggling to engage’ as they often fail to answer the question when side-tracked in this way. Brief answers were not uncommon. Appropriate comments and a range of supporting details were essential to those who wished to accumulate marks.

The key messages regarding a this question remain the same across all exam series. This task does not intend to encourage the showcasing of every technical device (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question). Instead, the question aims to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer’s arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader. Those who perform well mostly concentrate on the content of the passage and work through it chronologically. Top Band answers go beyond the spotting of factual content and are selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about its effect. The best answers respond to language and consider the ways in which the writer’s argument develops.

Text C was rich in persuasive content with both the structure and the supporting images contributing towards the writer’s key messages. The text began with a brief introduction regarding the ‘Sugar Research Foundation’ and some candidates included exploration of this historically misleading information. At the lower end of the cohort, candidates relied on the spotting of factual information with some literal explanations of meaning. Higher up the rank order, candidates began to include some language analysis and terminology in their comments. Few candidates managed to secure marks in Band 4 or 5, but those who did so usually included a range of detail, a secure focus on the task and well-selected comments relating to the writer’s method.

## TEXT D

### A8. In your own words, summarise the advice given about sugar in your diet. [4]

*This question tested the ability to summarise information.*

Text D was an article which gave an opinion about the consumption of sugar. The author of the article sought to explore some of the myths and misunderstandings related to sugar. During PL meetings this Autumn, we have commented on the positive progress being made in relation to summary. A stronger focus on summative skills was evident during the summer exams and this was also the case this November.

A good summary answer is usually:

- brief
- never goes beyond the lines given in the exam
- separates points clearly
- uses bullet points or concise sentences
- where possible, tries not to use words or copy from the text.

During this series, it was clear that fewer candidates are quoting information or explaining the information selected. However, there is still work to be done in relation to conciseness. This was a relatively challenging summary question and those who performed best tried to step back from the passage and select the salient points.

- A9. In Text D, the writer states that it is ‘trendy to be sour on sugar’. Explain what this phrase means. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This was the first question based on Text D. Like A6, this question required candidates to engage with the meaning of a phrase. However, in this case, candidates were required to use their own wording to provide an explanation of meaning. The phrase in question could be found in the penultimate line of the passage and while most candidates tried to explore the meaning of the phrase, a small minority simply chose to copy out some of the surrounding words. This is an approach that is to be advised against as the surrounding words usually either contextualise or explain the phrase in question rather than give its meaning. In order to successfully explore the phrase, candidates had to engage with the meaning of ‘trendy’ and also ‘sour on sugar’. Those who used synonyms for ‘trendy’ such as ‘popular’, ‘fashionable’ or ‘common’ coupled with an explanation suggesting that ‘sour’ was to be ‘against’ or ‘anti’ sugar performed best. Those who only engaged with one part of the phrase were not eligible for credit. Some interesting interpretations such as ‘the current mode of thinking is to see sugar as devilish’ were found and, if correct, duly credited.

- A10. Give one reason why Text D may not be a reliable source. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing and understand and recognise the reliability of texts.*

Text D was taken from a somewhat anecdotal article which claimed to give the ‘Truth About Sugar’. While the text was packed with opinion and phrases such as ‘true’ and modal verbs such as ‘can’, it lacked any concrete evidence or expert opinion. A wide range of responses were on offer in response to the question. Those who tried to be brief, giving one or two words in response to the question were often unsuccessful as were those who made vague assertions such as ‘there is no author’. There was a wide range of possible responses and valid alternatives could be credited. Those who referred to the fact that the article lacked ‘evidence’ or ‘sources’ were correct, and this was the most common option. It was possible to make some headway by commenting on the lack of statistical evidence, but this needed to be underpinned with phrasing to suggest the candidate understood why this causes the source to be unreliable. This was a challenging question, but it was pleasing to note how many candidates attempted the question and worked diligently to provide some explanation in relation to the task.

## **TEXT E**

- A11. What evidence is there to show that the writer thinks giving up sugar is very difficult? [6]**

*This question tested the ability to locate information, to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

Text E was quite a challenging text (a blog written by an individual who tried to give up sugar completely) and the writer’s tone took a little unpicking. The first question based on this text required candidates to read the whole text and to locate evidence to show why they found ‘giving up sugar’ to be ‘very difficult’.

Most candidates concentrated on the word 'evidence' and realised that this would be instrumental in their answers. With plentiful evidence to use in an answer, those who thought about how to structure a response and included a range of evidence were most successful. The best selected evidence but, where necessary, included some brief explanatory phrases to ensure the evidence selected was framed in a way that answered the question. A minority chose to write about the text and what the writer found difficult. Such responses were more difficult to credit as candidates often chunked together ideas and failed to present them as separate points. For example, the fourth paragraph was rich in content and those who separated the ideas could make good progress but those who were unselective in their selection of information were less successful. Paraphrasing was not a particularly successful approach as many candidates simply presented a merged collection of details without correctly separating the evidence.

**A12. Write down two food groups that the writer feels are part of a sensible diet. [1]**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts*

This was a straightforward location question. Candidates should be familiar with questions where they are required to give **two** details for one mark, and most were successful in scoring one mark for this task. Four options were available for credit and candidates could choose any combination of two different bullet points. Those who were unsuccessful tended to cite food types rather than food groups.

**A13. The writer mentions the 'utopian point of no longer craving sugar'. What is meant by the word, utopian? [1]**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This question was deliberately challenging but the level of engagement and understanding from many candidates was particularly pleasing. To answer this question successfully, candidates were required to give an explanation of the word 'utopian'. Unlike the previous word meaning questions, this task simply asked them to explore the meaning of a single word rather than a phrase. Precision was required and those who tried to give alternative meanings as a guise for not understanding often presented conflicting ideas and were not credited. A broad range of correct answers were presented, some focused solely on the word 'utopian' and sometimes gave very clear one-word answers such as 'perfect' or 'ideal' and were credited. Others worked with the text to explain the phrase in context and, where correct, were credited. A small minority did not complete the question but many of those who did, worked hard to deduce a credible meaning for the phrase.

**A14. Compare what the writers of Text D and Text E think about eating sugar. [10]**

*This question tested the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and comparing and evaluating the usefulness, relevance and presentation of content.*

The final question in the reading section asked candidates to compare what the two writers 'think about eating sugar'.

This question gave a specific focus on the writer's thoughts and was not a general comparison of the two texts (as a small minority seemed to think). The key to successfully answering a comparison question is to read the question carefully. The question will always give candidates a steer on what they need to compare. Another skill required to be able to compare correctly is to find relevant evidence. Once a candidate has selected relevant evidence, they should then be able to collate their ideas which will then allow them to produce a valid and relevant comparison.

As per the Summer series, a number of candidates chose to simply include a bullet point list of evidence. This approach is extremely difficult to credit as it lacks any sort of comparison. Grid approaches are not advised for the same reason. Candidates are able to comment on one text at a time, but it is imperative that they make links and comparisons across the two. Superficial comparisons where candidates simply find two random pieces of evidence and try to align them using 'whereas' or 'however' should also be avoided. The best approach is an integrated approach where candidates cross reference the sources.

The following may help to refine teaching techniques for this question:

- candidates must read the question carefully and remain on task
- when candidates produce a comparison, it is imperative that they reference each text clearly (e.g., Text E states...)
- candidates need to refer to both texts, not just one
- candidates must make as many points as possible from each of the texts. Those who simply write down one or two points will only gain a small number of marks.

## Section B

### **B1. Write an article for a teenage magazine in which you give your views on the importance of celebrities in our modern lives. [20]**

The argumentation task for this series was loosely linked to Text E which made reference to 'the #nosugar celebrities' in the third paragraph. The task appeared to appeal to many candidates who were effusive in their praise of celebrities and their impact on young people. On the whole, candidates chose to write about social media or sporting celebrities although there were some alternative choices with candidates plumping for high profile influential individuals such as Greta Thunberg. Unsurprisingly, they often had a wealth of information at their fingertips about celebrities and their actions. While most were positive, a small minority chose to write scathing attacks about celebrities and their negative antics. It is always interesting to read an alternative view although these were seldom seen.

Planning was evident across some responses and it is clear that work has been done in terms of encouraging candidates to focus on the actual content during the planning stage (rather than writing a list of techniques to include). Those who produce content driven plans, usually find that they are able to write in more detail and with greater understanding and coherence than those who do not. Structure and sequence are also key to success. Some used the planning page not only to plan their writing but to give an indication of sequence. Quite often, candidates who did not plan or consider sequence, produced writing that was disjointed or aimless in direction and undeveloped.

In terms of format, candidates have relative freedom when it comes to an article. Some feel compelled to use columns and headings while others simply produce the text for the article. Either approach is fine, it is the written content that is being assessed. If candidates find that structural features help them to organise their thoughts, then that is perfectly acceptable. In previous series, reference has been made to the inclusion of detailed illustrations, graphs and diagrams. Occasionally candidates included a rough sketch or a box with an instruction (e.g., 'picture of Ronaldo') but these were not included at the expense of written detail. Some candidates were unable to finish their article and it is worth reinforcing the value of careful time management to avoid having to miss out key details.

As always, technical accuracy was a concern. Some candidates struggled to punctuate from the beginning with strangely placed commas in titles. Some managed to write entire paragraphs/pages with only a full stop at the end. Comma splicing was an all-too-common feature in written work. The usual spelling errors continued with many basic homophone errors occurring frequently (our and are, there and their, where and were etc.). It was also disappointing when candidates did not manage to spell words correctly that they had been given in the texts/task (e.g. celebrities).

**B2. 'There's really no harm in eating a sensible amount of sugar (particularly if it's part of a balanced diet and comes with a side of exercise)'. [20]**

**Write a talk for your classmates persuading them to live a healthy lifestyle.**

Candidates are familiar with talks and this series saw them being asked to give a persuasive talk about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle. During CPD/Webinar sessions, the message has been clear in relation to a talk: work out the audience and then produce a piece of continuous prose/paragraphed writing to appeal to them. The majority produced somewhere ranging between 2-5 paragraphs of writing focusing on the topic. Some chose to place speech marks at the beginning and end of their talk, and these were not necessary. A small minority choose to produce scripted writing and this approach was much less successful and should be avoided. Too often, candidates who attempt to use this format end up focusing on stage directions and the delivery of the speech/character interactions rather than its content.

The organisation of a talk is key to its coherence. Organisation does, of course, include obvious indicators such as paragraphs and headings but the direction and content are also closely linked to organisation. Candidates who did not plan their talk often appeared to be disorganised and this had a serious impact on the quality of their work. A series of disjointed and undeveloped responses were usually restricted to Band 2. It is worth sharing examples of disjointed writing with candidates to ensure they work to avoid this approach in their own writing.

This task was more closely linked to the reading materials and, as such, saw a greater reliance on source materials. Some sensibly included one or two facts from the reading materials (it is not a prerequisite to do so), and embedded these into their own writing, but others copied too many details from the sources. Several candidates copied huge chunks of the source materials, often plucking points from one text and then trying to attach them to points from another. Wholesale copying was relatively infrequent and is to be avoided at all costs. It is also very disappointing when a candidate chooses to write out entire sentences from the texts and then copies down incorrect spellings and punctuation. Losing sight of the task was also problematic. A small minority ended up writing a personal talk for an overweight/alcoholic friend, for example, rather than focusing on the task.

Finally, the audience for this task was of importance. Candidates ought to be reminded that when they are given a specific audience, they are expected to tailor their tone, style, content and language for that specific audience. Finally, brevity was a real issue for a number of candidates. A significant number of candidates wrote less than half a side of A4. With limited detail and development, it is virtually impossible to move beyond Bands 1 or 2.

### **Summary of key points**

- Brevity and a lack of detail in the writing tasks was an issue for a significant number of candidates.
- Candidates should try to attempt all questions across the paper to avoid missing out tasks.
- Copying unselectively is to be avoided across all questions/tasks.
- Planning (of writing) is improving, and candidates should continue to focus on content (as opposed to techniques) when planning writing in the examination.



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