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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCE  
ENGLISH LITERATURE  
AS/Advanced**

**SUMMER 2022**

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# AS LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

## General Certificate of Education

Summer 2022

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

#### General Comments

There was a great deal to admire in much of the work seen by examiners who were quick to comment on the high standard of candidate responses. What was even more pleasing was the range of texts covered. While, as expected, *Jane Eyre* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* were the most popular choices, it was encouraging to see a marked increase in centres choosing to respond to the traditionally less popular texts such as *David Copperfield*, *North and South* and *Top Girls*. All of these texts are rich in context and responses demonstrated the ease in which many candidates were able to access and explore the complexities of the relevant time periods. Likewise, those centres choosing to take on the challenge of a new text and teach *Translations* are to be commended; many candidates successfully explored relevant critical opinion alongside their own analysis of the play to produce some perceptive responses.

Overall, the quality of many pupil responses was excellent. As a reminder, however, it is important that centres look back over previous Principal Examiner's Reports to ensure that common reoccurring errors are identified and addressed. Indeed, once again there was evidence of some broad, pre-rehearsed introductions being used which jarred with the question and hindered the candidate's sense of argument. Handwriting and timing continued to be an issue for some while there was a notable increase in informal phrases/slang being used. Centres are encouraged to remind candidates that such lapses in expression inevitably affect the academic tone of the response and, as such, the AO1 mark. It is also worth noting that candidates should only write the question number in the margin and are not expected to write the full question out. Many candidates wasted valuable time by writing out the question – including, in many cases, the critical view – which was unnecessary.

#### Comments on individual questions/sections

##### Section A: Prose

##### (01) Jane Austen: *Sense and Sensibility*

*Sense and Sensibility* was a popular choice of text and examiners saw some strong responses to both the extract and the essay question. The vast majority of candidates were able to identify and explore the contrast between Mr and Mrs Palmer's presentations and the way in which Austen shaped the passage to set Mr Palmer's rudeness against the naturally friendly nature of his wife so show the distance between them. Likewise, the essay proved accessible for most candidates. Examiners were particularly pleased to read responses which engaged in a debate as to whether 'love always comes second to social advancement'. It is worth noting, however, that there was a notable increase in candidates re-using the extract material in their essay response which limited their response and was, inevitably, self-penalising.

### **(02) Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre***

Once again, *Jane Eyre* was the pre-1900 prose text which dominated Unit 1 and the accessibility of both the extract and the essay question was reflected in the quality of some of the responses seen. Indeed, most candidates were able to comment on the dominating nature of Rochester's character and the effect of Brontë's use of imperative language. Furthermore, it was pleasing to read many responses where candidates had discussed the complexities of Rochester and the way in which a very subtle vulnerability could be read in his depiction. A significant minority of candidates drifted into a discussion of Bertha and the treatment of Victorian woman which did not allow them to access the higher bands for AO1 or AO2.

Overall, candidates engaged competently with the essay question and there were many strong responses which successfully addressed all of the AOs. Those candidates who focused on the question's use of 'always' naturally provided a sense of debate and discussion which is to be commended. The majority of candidates focused on Jane with some commenting on her resistance to conform to the passive mid-Victorian ideal of the 'Angel in the House' to gain a sense of power and control at the end of the novel. However, it was disappointing to see a significant minority of candidates choosing to focus only on events at the very start of the novel which, unfortunately, suggested a lack of familiarity with the whole of the text.

### **(03) Elizabeth Gaskell: *North and South***

Although this is a less popular choice of text, there were many excellent responses from candidates who demonstrated a confidence with analysing both the extract and addressing the critical view in the question. The vast majority of responses discussed the depiction of Mrs Thornton as a stern and unsympathetic woman and selected some key quotations to back up their evaluation of her character, commenting on the significance of Gaskell's use of dialogue. Likewise, the essay question's focus on 'northerners and southerners' was accessible for most candidates who took the opportunity to bring in the novel's rich contextual material to illuminate their discussion and weave together close textual analysis with relevant contextual detail.

### **(04) Charles Dickens: *David Copperfield***

It was very pleasing to see a few centres choosing to teach this Dickensian novel and, as mentioned earlier in the report, these centres are to be commended. The majority of candidates were able to position the extract in the wider novel and comment on the distress and suffering of Emily, keeping their focus on the passage rather than drifting into a narrative-driven discussion of the history between Emily and Rosa. This is always the danger when handling such a long Victorian text so it was good to see candidates keeping their responses focused and analytical. The most successful responses also commented on the first-person perspective and the author's structuring of the passage. The demand of the essay question was such that a range of successful approaches were taken by candidates. When the essay was well planned, the candidates used various 'homes' to allow them to integrate relevant contextual and critical material into their own argument.

### **(05) Thomas Hardy: *The Mayor of Casterbridge***

This continued to be a popular text with candidates generally engaging well with the extract on Captain Newson. Many were able to discuss the naivety of the character although a significant minority were overly long and repetitive. Some candidates also became side-tracked by the relationship between Elizabeth-Jane and Newson which was not the focus of the question. With regards to the essay question's statement that 'no character in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is able to truly forgive', weaker candidates simply tracked through the text giving examples of characters holding grudges while the more confident and successful candidates explored the complexities of forgiveness which often led to a contextually informed discussion.

#### **Points for Consideration: Extract**

##### **AO1**

- As stated in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 paper is important as it is advised that only 20 minutes is spent on Section A, part (i). Spending too long on the extract has ramifications for not only Section A, part (ii) but also Section B. Centres are encouraged to provide opportunities for candidates to answer past paper questions under strict timed conditions to help them prepare for the timing demands of the exam.
- A detailed analysis is expected for part (i) and candidates should keep their focus on the given extract. Irrelevant references to the wider novel, historical context or critical views will not be rewarded and are self-penalising.

##### **AO2**

- Stronger responses selected key quotations and explored the way in which language and writer's techniques created a layering of meaning.
- Less successful responses inevitably drifted into a narrative re-telling of the extract and struggled to explore the nuances of language and the effect upon the reader.
- Surprisingly, there was more evidence of candidates applying poetic terms – such as enjambment and caesura – to their analysis of prose. Centres are encouraged to remind candidates of the differences between poetry and prose and support them in their understanding of these very different literary genres.

#### **Points for Consideration: Essay**

##### **AO1**

- Once again, timings continued to trouble some candidates who had clearly spent too long on the extract and, inevitably, rushed the essay despite its heavier mark allocation of 40. As mentioned previously, candidates should be provided with opportunities to complete timed responses in class to prepare them for the challenges of exam conditions.
- Effective planning is to be encouraged in order for candidates to produce a clear and concise sense of argument. Some candidates included detailed plans on their script but it is important to reiterate that marks cannot be allocated for planning alone and candidates must not allow planning time to hinder essay writing time.
- It was pleasing to see the vast majority of candidates using the extract as a 'springboard' into their analytical essay and not re-visiting the Section A, part (i) material in order to 'pad out' their part (ii).
- There was evidence of a balance of approaches whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others identified two separate parts of the novel: both approaches are valid.

- Many responses displayed a strong grasp of an academic register and this is to be further encouraged. However, candidates are to be discouraged from referring to the authors by their first names and to avoid overuse of the first person. Additionally, significant inaccuracies in spelling and punctuation inevitably affected clarity of meaning and prevented candidates from accessing the higher bands for AO1.

## **AO2**

- A significant minority of candidates simply embedded irrelevant textual quotes and struggled to engage with them. Unfortunately, as this is a closed book exam there were some instances where some candidates failed to include any specific textual references and simply provided a broad narrative account of the novel in general. It is not the case that candidates need to include a large quantity of quotations but they do need to include enough to build a strong analytical argument. The best responses were able to isolate key words/phrases and explored technique, implicit meaning, tone and attitude.
- While strong responses were confident in how an author used literary and prose techniques and language choices for effect, others fell back on simply spotting features from English Language study – such as asyndetic listing, modal verb, noun phrase etc. – without commenting further.
- As stated in previous CPD training and Principal Examiner’s Reports, many candidates used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5. A close textual analysis is often the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.

## **AO3**

- It is important, once again, to emphasise that although there is a heavy weighting of marks for contextual understanding and analysis, references to AO3 should be used to illuminate a candidate’s own argument and analysis rather than dominate it. Lengthy pre-prepared paragraphs of ‘detached’ context does little to allow a candidate to structure a successful response. Candidates will not score highly unless relevant historical, literary and cultural context is carefully connected to analytical discussion. Principal Examiners across the papers have consistently recommended a task-text-context approach: this is reiterated again this year.
- Many examiners noted that weaker responses did not acknowledge context at all. It is important that centres note the mark allocation for this AO and ensure that candidates understand the importance of alluding to relevant contextual details.

## **AO5**

- Candidates must use other relevant opinion to inform their own discussion of the text and build a personal response. Indeed, the stronger responses used alternative views to create a sense of debate and discussion.
- Lengthy sweeping statements from critics which are not fully integrated into the candidate’s argument engulfed analytical discussion and did little to help candidates achieve the higher bands.
- It is important to note that a minority of responses used inaccurate and, at times incoherent, critical quotes which had clearly not been taken from an academic source. Centres are encouraged to direct candidates to academic critical material in order to illuminate their understanding of the text and support their use of AO5.
- As stated previously, centres should advise candidates that there are a number of ways to gain marks for AO5:
  - (i) Engaging with specific critical views (i.e. literary criticism)
  - (ii) Engaging with critical perspectives i.e. (Marxism/feminism)
  - (iii) Offering multiple readings of characters/events etc.
- There were some cases where candidates did not include any alternative readings or even any tentative vocabulary (such as ‘perhaps’ or ‘suggests’). These candidates can only be awarded a mark of zero for this AO

## Section B: Drama

### **(06/07) Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus***

Marlowe's play was a popular choice and it was enjoyable to read and examine so many thoughtful, perceptive and subtle responses with many candidates successfully balancing the AOs. Once again, it was pleasing to see fewer candidates drifting into irrelevant biographical detail about Marlowe's life. There was an equal balance in popularity between the questions and many candidates addressed the complexities of their question's critical statement to provide a sense of debate and discussion. As this is a closed-book exam, it was impressive to see so many candidates accurately quoting from *Doctor Faustus* although, inevitably, the weaker responses re-told the story rather than analysed the play's use language and dramatic devices.

### **(08/09) Oscar Wilde: *Lady Windermere's Fan***

Wilde's play continues to grow in popularity and many candidates displayed a confident understanding of not only the text itself but also the literary and cultural contexts which influenced it. There was a balance of candidates responding to both questions with the stronger responses to 09 engaging directly with the various ways Wilde uses *Lady Windermere's Fan* to 'celebrate the corruption of London Society'. Inevitably, however, weaker candidates relied upon description and irrelevant biographical detail which prevented them from closely analysing the language and dramatic features of the play. Unfortunately, once again, there was a significant minority of responses which included pre-rehearsed introductions that had little or, in some cases, nothing to do with the title in question. Centres are reminded that this approach is not helpful for the candidate and is to be discouraged.

### **(10/11) Tennessee Williams: *A Streetcar Named Desire***

This was, by far, the most popular drama text with many candidates opting to answer Question 11 on the relationship between passion and violence in *A Streetcar Named Desire*. The strongest responses discussed the nuances of the question and the ways in which Williams used plastic theatre to explore the relationship between various types of violence (physical/ sexual/ psychological) and desire. In a significant number of responses, candidates demonstrated a real ability to engage with relevant critical material and successfully blended the AOs. Once again, moreover, it was pleasing to see many candidates use biographical detail subtly. However, there was still a significant minority of responses which barely referenced any contextual detail and, therefore, struggled to access even the lower bands.

### **(12/13) Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls***

The questions were accessible with a balance of candidates choosing to respond to each question, discussing the impact of techniques such as the overlapping dialogue and irony for effect. There were some sophisticated responses which confidently discussed the whole play, drawing upon various relevant contextual detail to help inform and shape their argument. On occasion, however, there were examples of candidates only commenting on the historical figures with little-to-no reference to Marlene or any of the other characters in the play. Inevitably, these responses were limited and failed to access the higher bands.

### **(14/15) Brian Friel: *Translations***

As mentioned earlier in the report, it was good to see a few centres choosing this new text with a balance of popularity between the questions. Many candidates demonstrated a confident understanding of the play and used relevant historical detail to enhance their own analysis. Indeed, some of the stronger responses confidently embedded contextual information and critical opinion into their own argument which helped to create a coherent sense of discussion and debate. Only a few responses drifted away from the text to include large paragraphs of pre-rehearsed detail about Irish history which, inevitably, was limiting and self-penalising. Although a confident understanding of Anglo-Irish history is necessary for an understanding of the text, this knowledge should be used to drive candidates' analysis of *Translations*.

### **(16/17) Joe Orton: *Loot***

No candidates attempted the questions on *Loot*. This is the last time that this text will be assessed on this specification.

## **Section B: Drama**

### **Points for Consideration**

#### **AO1**

- As with Section A, planning is essential for candidates to construct a coherent and perceptive discussion of their chosen drama text. It is advised that candidates spend 60 minutes on Section B so, as mentioned in previous Unit 1 Principal Examiner's Reports, strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing underdeveloped responses for Section B.
- The strongest answers remained focused on the question throughout and clearly discussed the text as a play: a confident awareness of genre characterised the better responses with a perceptive analysis of dramatic techniques.

#### **AO2**

- Many Section B responses used close textual analysis as a springboard into AO3 and AO5 with the most successful weaving together all three with confidence and sophistication.
- It was good to see a marked increase of candidates discussing the effect of not only language but specific dramatic devices such as lighting, music, props and staging. There was also a significant number of candidates who had watched a live performance of their chosen play (either streamed online or at a theatre) and analysed the director's use of stagecraft; this is to be further encouraged to help candidates to fully engage with the play as a performance.

#### **AO3**

The strongest responses explored the significance and influence of relevant historical, literary and cultural contexts. As mentioned in previous Principal Examiner's Reports, while some biographical detail is important to understand a play's reception, it is vital that candidates allude to the impact of biographical detail when analysing language or dramatic techniques. Large pre-rehearsed paragraphs of irrelevant biographical detail cannot be rewarded.

As mentioned in Section A, centres are to advise candidates to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than engulfs the response.

## **AO5**

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

## **Summary of key points**

### **Section A: Extract**

- Keep the focus only on the extract and on AO1 and AO2.
- Remember that this is a prose text. Avoid poetic terminology.

### **Section A: Essay**

- Ensure that candidates use an academic register.
- Give learners plenty of opportunities to practice timed essays in preparation for the exam.
- Avoid feature-spotting.
- A close textual analysis is often the most successful way into analysing context or exploring alternative interpretations.
- Remember 'Task-Text-Context'.
- Centres are encouraged to direct candidates to academic critical material in order to illuminate their understanding of the text and support their use of AO5.

### **Section B**

- Planning is essential for candidates to construct a coherent and perceptive discussion.
- Candidates should fully engage with the play as a performance.
- Long pre-rehearsed paragraphs of irrelevant biographical detail cannot be rewarded.
- Candidates must use other relevant opinion to inform their own discussion of the text and build a personal response.

## **AS LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE**

### **General Certificate of Education**

**Summer 2022**

### **Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

### **UNIT 2: POETRY POST-1900**

#### **General Comments**

Despite the very challenging circumstances of previous years, examiners were happy to note that most candidates had successfully prepared for and addressed the examination. Some candidates responded to the texts with perception and sophistication but it was disappointing to see an increase in rubric infringements particularly in Section B, which had a highly detrimental effect on the performance of many candidates. Examples of specific rubric infringements and how to avoid them in future are detailed in the relevant sections. Yet again, some candidates had answered Section B before A; however, some candidates dedicated too much time to Section B leaving their Section A answers very brief or even incomplete. In some cases, this affected their marks for the section and we would like to emphasise again for centres to provide more timed practices to avoid rushed and incomplete responses. Handwriting was problematic for a higher number of candidates this year and it was noticeable that legibility decreased as responses developed. Again, timed practices could help with this issue.

Duffy and Larkin were clearly the most popular with some centres choosing to study Sheers and Heaney. Responses were also seen on Hughes and Plath but only a small minority of centres chose to study Thomas and Lewis. It was disappointing to see so few centres choosing the new pairing of Abse and Yeats.

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

##### **Section A: Critical Analysis**

Many perceptive responses were seen with some writing in great detail and length for the time allowed. However, some answers were overly concise barely reaching two sides of the answer booklets with some only a side long. These responses tended to be limited, lacked close analysis of the texts and did not always answer the questions set in enough detail. As we recommend candidates to spend approximately 45 minutes on this section, it is expected that candidates write in some detail. Some candidates answered both questions in Section A, a rubric infringement. Although examiners marked both responses and awarded the highest mark, the responses were invariably too brief and frequently infringed into time which should have been used for Section B.

Other rubric infringements included many detailed references to context, critical views and, concerningly, answering on a poem not noted on the examination paper: the most common of these was answering on Duffy's 'Mean Time' instead of 'Close'.

### **(01) Edward Thomas**

This was the more popular choice of the two Section A poems for this pairing. Most candidates successfully grasped the concepts of stillness and intimacy contrasting with a sense of threat from the encroaching war. However some candidates included AO3 (not assessed) by writing about war or speculating about Thomas' state of mind or his struggles with depression. Some candidates struggled to accurately discuss the rhyme (several referred to rhyming couplets) and its effect.

### **(02) Alun Lewis**

A far less popular option which produced less confident responses. Some candidates failed to fully address the 'sense of place' in the question, resulting in responses which were narrowly focused on the castle itself or overly reliant on context. However, there were some excellent responses which explored the romantic sense of place and impact of the second person addressed, particularly in the first and fourth stanzas.

### **(03) W.B. Yeats**

This was the slightly more popular option of the two Section A questions for Abse/Yeats, with a range of approaches to sorrow: some candidates focused on Yeats' sorrow due to the loss of his relationship with Maud Gonne while others took a broader approach and discussed aging. While there was a generally clear analysis in the responses with many candidates writing in detail on the symbolism of the swans, a surprising number did not address the impact or significance of the autumnal setting in creating a sorrowful atmosphere.

### **(04) Dannie Abse**

Although this was a slightly less popular choice, responses were more successful. Most candidates discussed the presentation of prejudice effectively, although some narrowly focused on the use of the Darren Jones persona. More successful candidates extended their discussion to include society's prejudice with many responses including close analysis of Abse's use of colloquial language and symbolism.

### **(05) D.H. Lawrence and (06) Gillian Clarke (for re-sitting candidates only)**

No candidates responded to questions on these texts.

### **(07) Ted Hughes**

Examiners commented on some confident responses which dealt with Hughes' language and imagery very well, discussing his use of symbolism relating to war. Despite this, a small number of candidates struggled with the poem's imagery and did not analyse in depth. It was pleasing to see a lack of AO3 included in the vast majority of responses.

### **(08) Sylvia Plath**

An equally popular choice as 'Thistles', producing some fairly strong responses to the poem dealing with Plath's use of imagery and poetic voice well. Some more successful candidates discussed Plath's use of the extended metaphor and potentially sinister imagery well. Contextual details on Plath's motherhood were discussed in a very small minority of responses but most candidates kept their focus firmly on AO1 and AO2 only.

### **(09) Philip Larkin**

A popular choice where some candidates engaged with Larkin's overall depiction of work with some level of success, accurately discussing the persona's cynicism and cruel tone. The most successful candidates briefly referred to "Toads" and Larkin's change of viewpoint which gave them a clear focus on the attitudes towards work. However, a high number of candidates misread the poem inaccurately, mistakenly commenting that Larkin was envious of the "characters" in the park and that working only lead to death, leading to significantly lower marks.

### **(10) Carol Ann Duffy**

One of the most popular choices of the paper, where many candidates responded successfully and in some detail. Many candidates dealt with Duffy's use of imperatives well but some responses misread the poem claiming that the relationship was loving and passionate without any sign of coercion or dominance. More successful candidates commented on the ambiguity of the title and the significance of the poem's structure (especially the use of short, abrupt sentences). Some candidates included AO3 with some speculation on which relationship of Duffy's was discussed in the poem. Candidates are reminded that AO3 is not assessed in Section A and its inclusion can detrimentally affect the structure and the flow of the response.

### **(11) Seamus Heaney**

A less popular choice than Sheers' poem, examiners commented on many successful responses which discussed Heaney's creation of a sense of place in depth. The most successful candidates explored Heaney's use of imagery and discussed the effect of questions and the second person. There were quite a few rubric infringements in as a number of candidates made use of the whole poem which had a detrimental effect on marks, as only some aspects of their responses were relevant. Some other weaknesses included detailed inclusion of AO3.

### **(12) Owen Sheers**

This proved to be a very popular choice with some interesting and original observations made on Sheers' depiction of beauty. Many candidates commented on Sheer's use of zoomorphism and aural effects with some success although many would have benefited on a closer focus to the question. A minority of responses did not refer to the change in tone and setting between the first and second section of the poem leading to a very narrow approach, which did not always answer the question fully.

### **AO1**

- Many candidates wrote general analyses on the named poems without focussing on the theme noted. Although aspects of the responses touched upon the themes, much of the essays lacked application to the question wording.
- As accuracy in spelling, grammar and punctuation is one of the foci of AO1, some candidates' marks were negatively affected by careless errors in expression, which led to a lack of clarity.
- Informality in register and tone was still a problem for many candidates. Referring to the poets by their first names and voicing their opinion on the poets' lifestyles does not equate to an academic register.
- Some candidates used linguistic terminology usually seen in English Language A level this year. Some terms, of course, overlap but some essays were hampered by excessive (and not always correct) use of linguistic terminology.
- There were far more mis-readings of texts this year where the candidates responded inaccurately to the meaning and content of the poem. This, quite obviously, had an effect on AO1 marks.

### **AO2**

- Examiners saw some detailed and confident analysis of the poems chosen, many with a sophisticated balance between close examination of techniques used and the writer's intended meaning.
- Some candidates only dealt with a stream of implicit readings. While these have their place, some literary analysis based on techniques and effect would improve the overall quality of these responses.

- Conversely, some responses depended on “technique spotting” without any detailed comments. This approach limits the marks awarded and would be improved considerably with an examination of the effect of the techniques on the reader.
- Examiners noted that the strongest responses used a well-chosen selection of quotations and did not attempt to analyse the whole poem within the time given.

## **Section B: Poetry comparison**

### **(13/14) Thomas and Lewis**

Both questions were equally popular with the most successful candidates producing well-structured, well-developed responses which incorporated context and made effective comparisons. The question on loss was particularly well handled with many confident explorations of loss of intimacy in personal relationships, self-identity, loss in wartime, loss through industrialisation and more. Responses to the relationship between nature and human beings were less confidently handled, with some candidates misreading the question and focusing on the presentation of nature, or the nature of humanity.

### **(15/16) Yeats and Abse**

Question 16 on the depiction of memories was much more popular with very few candidates choosing the question on national and cultural identity, although some poems were used for both questions. Candidates distinguished between Abse’s more light-hearted approach with a focus on his own family members and Yeats’ overtly political and perhaps less hopeful reflections on memories. In both questions candidates made good use of context, although there was a tendency to address context more directly for Yeats than Abse.

### **(17/18) Lawrence and Clarke (for re-sitting candidates only)**

No candidates responded to questions on these texts.

### **(19/20) Hughes and Plath**

Question 20 was by far the more popular of the two questions with many candidates successfully exploring a range of relationships. The most successful responses examined elements beyond the poets’ relationships with each other and examined relationships with family members and the poet’s relationship with him/herself. A recurring issue with this pairing is that some candidates over-emphasise the relationship between the poets without considering their influences beyond that relationship. Fewer candidates attempted Q19 but, in general, their focus was clearer and avoided over-biographical AO3.

### **(21/22) Larkin and Duffy**

Larkin and Duffy continue to be a very popular choice for centres and therefore a wide range of responses was seen by examiners. Question 21 proved to be the most popular with successful answers including some perceptive and well-selected contextual detail. Some responses lost focus on memories in Question 22 and instead wrote responses dealing with the past. Very few also displayed a clear understanding of Larkin’s satirical tone in many poems selected for this question. Sweeping statements about the poets’ private lives were prevalent in responses to both questions, with many inaccuracies on Duffy’s background and upbringing and on Larkin’s complicated private life.

### **(23/24) Heaney and Sheers**

Question 24 was clearly the most popular choice with this pairing producing some confident responses to Heaney and Sheers’ depiction of romantic relationships. Examiners saw a range of responses using a generally relevant choice of poems although many responses chose a narrow range. Responses to Question 20 made use of a broader range of poems and were generally more successful. AO3 in responses to both questions tended to be dominated by Heaney, with mostly relevant references to his marriage and his life in Ireland and California (for Q24) and the effects of The Troubles (Q24), at the expense of Sheers.

### **AO1**

- Planning remains a key element in this section as balancing all five AOs needs clear structuring. Stronger responses in this section usually showed clear evidence of planning. It is recommended that candidates spend 10 to 15 minutes of their 1¼ hour planning their essays as structuring and developing their argument is crucial.
- Sadly, many more rubric infringements were seen this year, mainly with candidates focusing on fewer than the four poems required. In most cases, candidates only responded to two poems despite managing to write extensively and completing their essay. We would like to remind centres to emphasise the need to use four poems (two from each poet) to their candidates.
- It was pleasing to see fewer candidates using poems named in Section A. This also constitutes a rubric infringement and can have a highly negative effect on marks.
- Likewise, although not a rubric infringement, a few essays contained references to up to eight poems, which led to a superficial coverage of the texts.
- Informality continues to be a problem with many candidates writing in a non-academic register.

### **AO2**

- Stronger essays included an analysis of specific textual evidence as a link to contextual detail.
- Some candidates analysed their chosen poems in full, tracking through each line. This is unnecessary and time-consuming.
- Examiners noted that it was pleasing to see some thoughtful and purposeful discussion of the poets' use of structure as well as close analysis of language and literary techniques.
- The use of linguistic terminology should be restricted.

### **AO3**

- Contextual details were most successful when linked to specific aspects of the poems chosen while also linked to the question. Some original contextual links were seen but some, unfortunately, were not always relevant to the question.
- Band 5 answers made excellent use of specific context linked to poems/quotations and included social and historical context not merely general biographical detail.
- Context was woven into the essays more this year and not “tagged” on to the end of responses. However, it was slightly worrying to see that some centres had omitted AO3 altogether.
- The inaccuracy of some contextual detail is still a matter of concern as some candidates referred to incorrect birthdates, locations and relationships.
- Examiners saw many underdeveloped contextual links. As this AO is worth 20 marks, specific details are recommended.

### **AO4**

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

- Centres are reminded that linking poems by the same poet provides a limited scope for discussion.
- Connections made through AO3 (context) are to be discouraged.

### **AO5**

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

### **Summary of key points**

#### **Section A**

- Avoid excessive use of linguistic terminology.
- Choose key points carefully.
- Avoid feature-spotting.
- Ensure that candidates are given an opportunity to practice writing under timed conditions.
- Avoid context (AO3) as it is not assessed in this section.

#### **Section B**

- Give careful time for planning.
- Ensure that candidates cover four poems in the response by analysing two poems from each collection.
- Avoid a line-by-line approach to the analysis of poetry.
- Connections between poems should be focused on AO2.
- Simply using “arguably” or “perhaps” cannot score highly for AO5.

## A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

### General Certificate of Education

Summer 2022

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

### UNIT 3: PRE-1900 POETRY

#### General Comments

There were responses to all the texts. Milton was the least popular, with relatively few answers. Chaucer, Blake and Rossetti were probably the most popular. On the whole candidates engaged with the poetry with enthusiasm and knowledge. The strongest responses were as remarkable as in previous years, showing fluency, sophisticated understanding and perceptive analysis. However, there was a significant minority of candidates who struggled to engage with their texts and to write relevant answers. There may well have been more of these candidates than usual and it could be that the experience of the last two years played a large part in this reduced performance.

Candidates had certainly been well prepared for AO3. Most of them showed impressive, detailed knowledge of contextual influences. But this quite often led to a weakness. Some candidates wrote more about contexts than the texts themselves. Starting a response with a long introductory paragraph full of biographical and contextual details often led to a lack of focus on the question itself. The most secure responses tended to begin by addressing the key words in the question; remember task/text/context in that order, in which context is used to enhance understanding of the text.

If candidates wonder about how many poems/extracts they should refer to in parts (ii), most answered by writing about at least three. Candidates need to make sure their discussion is relevant and that they include other poems. It's sensible to choose other poems.

#### **Lack of exam experience may have resulted in the following:**

unnecessarily long responses to part (i) questions even though candidates are advised to spend twenty minutes on this section; then not having enough time to write a full response to part (ii)

- responses in which candidates struggled to focus on the question, for example, 'makes use of' in 2 (i) or 'overwhelming power' in 2 (ii)
- bringing in inappropriate AOs, such as AO3 in parts (i) or AO5 in parts (ii)
- spending too long on Section A and then not leaving enough time to read and think about all the poems in Section B
- very little evidence of planning, so essential to the important skill of selecting relevant material.

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

##### **(01) Chaucer**

Part (i) was mostly done very well, with candidates picking up on the irony and hyperbole in the passage and making use of their knowledge of the Merchant's presentation of Januarie up to this point. Part (ii) answers were very informed on the conventions of courtly romance and fabliaux. Most agreed with the question but some argued that there were characters (Januarie?) who were well aware that what they felt was desire rather than true love – no mistakes with them.

## **(02) Donne**

Part (i)'s strongest responses kept their focus on how Donne 'makes use of' the sun in the poem to present the lovers and the extraordinary all-consuming nature of their love. Less successful responses were not as selective and worked their way through the poem almost line by line, offering what often read like a prepared discussion. There were many excellent responses to part (ii), the strongest sustaining a focus on the key words 'overwhelming power'. Some candidates suffered from a surfeit of contextual knowledge, sometimes making too many references to Donne's relationship with Anne More, coming close to producing a largely biographical essay.

## **(03) Milton**

Most candidates engaged soundly with the extract in part (i), bringing out the complexity of Satan's character. Part (ii) also produced well-informed responses, many questioning to what extent Adam and Eve had free will in the first place. There were also some impressive discussions of the theological aspects of free will using Protestant and Catholic ideas from the period. Some explored what the question of free will said about the nature of God. A minority spent too much time looking at Satan. Once again, in a number of responses, contextual discussion took precedence over examination of the text.

## **(04) Blake**

This text, studied for the first time this summer, was very popular. Candidates liked 'The Little Black Boy' and wrote engaged, exploratory discussions of the poem. In response to part (ii), there were many excellent and heart-felt examinations of Blake's sometimes coruscating views of his society and of its religious and educational institutions. Candidates used poems such as 'London', 'The Chimney Sweeper', 'Holy Thursday' and 'The Garden of Love', poems that might be expected. But there were also imaginative and relevant references to 'Auguries of Innocence' and 'The Tyger'. Perhaps because Blake's poems are relatively short, responses exhibited a wider selection from the text. Unfortunately, once again, some candidates wrote more about Blake's time and biography than they did about the poetry. (Remember: text before context.)

## **(05) Rossetti**

'From the Antique' was a poem candidates wrote particularly well about. In part (ii) candidates focused on Rossetti's thoughts and feelings and how she used the natural world to express them while examining the social, religious and artistic influences behind them. Most candidates made relevant use of 'Autumn Violets', 'Amor Mundi', 'Have You Forgotten', 'An Apple Gathering' and 'Goblin Market'. Once again, a significant minority fell into the trap of writing separate paragraphs on contexts instead of referring to the relevant influences to explore their understanding of the task and the text.

## **Section B**

There was equal use of all three optional poems.

### **Poems B and A**

Candidates concentrated on the child's world, its inner world in A, with more attention to the wider world in B. Candidates drew a lot from their observation of the first-person narrator of A, and the apparent lack of narrator in B.

### **Poems C and A**

When it came to poems C and A, candidates were particularly interested in the mood and atmosphere of the poems, the tranquility of C and the perhaps more sinister, under-the-surface 'hum' of A.

## Poems D and A

Poem D threw some candidates because they interpreted 'dumb' as meaning stupid rather than not being able to speak. This could distort their reading of the rest of the poem. Nevertheless, most candidates saw the importance of the theme of language in both poem A and D and developed interesting links as a result.

The popular literary terms this year were anaphora, caesura and enjambment. Although usually correctly spotted, many candidates found it difficult to discuss their effects. Candidates are adept at discussing imagery and alliteration (sounds) and usually make sensible points about *their* effects. However, when it comes to discussing form candidates seem to struggle. They tend to fall back on asserting that the form fits the mood or subject matter of the poem without really exploring *how*.

In both sections of the paper, this year, the examiners generally felt that the candidates' writing about poetry was often descriptive, literal in approach. There was a lot of attention to surface features. Perhaps learners, because of so much recent interruption, hadn't had enough time to read widely in poetry as preparation in particular for the unseen section of the paper.

### Summary of key points

- For Section A, the most secure responses begin by addressing the key words in the question; remember task/text/context in that order, in which context is used to enhance understanding of the text.
- Learners need to practice writing in an exam to ensure that they divide their time wisely between different parts of the question paper.
- Giving time to planning responses is crucial. Trying to write a pre-learned essay on a similar question or with a similar focus will only bring limited reward.
- Feature-spotting is not a productive approach for writing about poetry. Candidates need to have an understanding of the poem as a whole in the first place and then to consider how meaning has been created by the poet.

## A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

### General Certificate of Education

Summer 2022

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

## UNIT 4: SHAKESPEARE

### General Comments

This year it was good to see so many candidates rising to the challenge of examinations after having had their education disrupted by the pandemic. This is a closed-book exam and candidates were able to recall material from their chosen text and, in many cases, use an impressive range of quotations to support their answers. It is important to note that in Section A, the extract question, a significant number of responses contained detailed reference to contexts (AO3) and sometimes critical opinions (AO5). Section A is only assessed for AO1 and AO2 but it would appear that not all candidates were aware of this. In Section B, context is heavily weighted and is worth 30 marks. It is therefore vital that candidates prepare for ways in which to address this key assessment objective. Those who were well prepared were able to draw upon a range of different contexts for their chosen text. There was some evidence of responses which contained more focus on critical sources than relevant contextual material, again indicating that some candidates were not considering assessment objective weightings.

As mentioned in previous years, the quality of written expression is important at this level and the mark scheme includes references to 'academic style' and the 'organisation' of responses. Candidates should be taught and encouraged to plan their answers, especially for Section B. There were essay responses which were very long and the quality of the writing deteriorated as the essay progressed. It would be more advantageous for candidates to focus on quality rather than quantity and to spend time planning before embarking upon their essays.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

*King Lear* was by far the most popular text this year. *Hamlet* was the second most popular, followed by *The Tempest*. A small percentage of centres chose *Antony and Cleopatra* and no centres opted for *King Henry IV Part 1*.

### Section A

#### (01) *King Lear*

Candidates found much to say about language and imagery in the *King Lear* extract and generally had a good balance of comments on both Lear and Goneril. Many responses contained clear and sound engagement with the metaphorical elements of Lear and Goneril's speech, and the contrast between Lear's exclamatory tone and Goneril's more measured approach. There was also clear appreciation of how Lear is beginning to reflect upon his actions in the latter part of the extract. A small number of candidates were confused about which lines Lear addresses to Albany, which led to some misreading of the end of the extract.

### **(02) *Antony and Cleopatra***

The *Antony and Cleopatra* extract responses often contained significant references to context (AO3) and critical opinions (AO5), which are not assessed in this section of the paper. However, there was some clear analysis of Antony's recognition of his own loss of identity and his sense of having been betrayed by Cleopatra.

### **(03) *Hamlet***

Candidates who responded to the *Hamlet* extract clearly had a good sense of the importance of this scene within the play as a whole. There was sound analysis of Hamlet's dominance of his mother and the persuasive way in which he directs her. Some responses were heavily built upon a Freudian reading of the extract, which was sometimes limiting in terms of the response to language and imagery. A significant number of candidates read 'that monster custom' as referring to Claudius, which led to a misreading of several lines of the extract. There was a tendency in some responses to use the final lines, where Hamlet references 'madness', to argue that much of what is said in this extract is due to Hamlet's madness.

### **(04) *King Henry IV Part 1***

No candidates responded to questions on this text.

### **(05) *The Tempest***

Candidates responded well to the presentation of Ferdinand in *The Tempest* extract. There was clear understanding of his sense of wonder at the sound of Ariel's music but also of his sense of grief for his father. Stronger responses contained analysis of how Prospero and Miranda's observations also add to Shakespeare's presentation of Ferdinand. There was some evidence of candidates drawing upon context (which is not assessed here) and some use of quotations from outside the extract, which is not a requirement and can limit the focus on the extract.

## **Section B**

In Section B, where there is a choice of two essay questions, there was a clear favourite question for all texts, with the exception of *The Tempest*.

### **(06/07) *King Lear***

Question 6 on *King Lear* was the most popular and many candidates really engaged with the view in the question, offering a range of ways in which 'hope' and 'despair' are presented in the play. Stronger candidates were sensitive to the peaks and troughs of hope and despair and were able to select different moments from the play to build an engaging academic argument. There were a small number of good responses to Question 7. Some candidates traced the connections between the plots, whilst stronger candidates were able to use contexts to build a convincing argument about how the sub-plot adds to the moral and philosophical weight of the tragedy.

### **(08/09) *Antony and Cleopatra***

Both questions 8 and 9 enabled candidates to engage with key concepts of the play. Question 9 was the most popular and candidates engaged with the central relationship of the play, finding interesting ways to identify moments of strength and weakness for both characters.

### **(10/11) *Hamlet***

Question 10 was very popular and handled well by the majority of candidates. There was real engagement with the view in the question and examiners read some well-constructed arguments on Hamlet's 'inadequacy as an avenger'. There was some impressive writing on Hamlet's place within the genre of Revenge Tragedy and how his Renaissance mindset complicates his position on revenge. Very few who chose question 11 understood the concept of 'state affairs'. As a result, most candidates ignored this part of the question and simply wrote about 'personal tragedy'.

### **(12/13) *King Henry IV Part 1***

No candidates responded to questions on this text.

### **(14/15) *The Tempest***

Many who chose Question 14 built clear and sound arguments on the significance of 'punishment' in the play. Caliban, Stefano and Ariel were used very effectively for this question. It was notable that there was some good use of different adaptations of the play for AO5. Many of those who chose Question 15 focused on the 'unreal' but were unable to relate back to the second part of the view in the question about the extent to which this hampers our ability to take the play seriously, leading to limited responses.

## **Summary of key points**

### **Section A**

- In Section A, the Shakespeare extract, there were some excellent responses where candidates had focused on language and imagery and carefully selected quotations to enhance the depth of their analysis. Answers which scored highly were not always the longest, reinforcing the point that quality is more important than quantity.
- As mentioned earlier, some candidates strayed into AO3 and AO5 which are not assessed in Section A.

### **Section B**

- In Section B, candidates generally balanced the assessment objectives well and were clearly seeking opportunities to address a range of contexts in their writing. A small number began the essay with an overview of context, with very little sense of how it connected to the text, but this was certainly not a major trend in answers.
- A substantial number of candidates used film and theatre productions of the plays as AO5 material. Some used these very well and engaged with the production as a specific interpretation of the text. Those who were less successful engaged in lengthy description of the production/film which took up a large proportion of the essay.
- Very long essays tended to deteriorate, in terms of quality of expression and analysis, as the essay progressed. Encourage candidates to plan before they begin writing and focus on quality over quantity.
- Context is heavily weighted in Section B but candidates must be reminded that context must always relate to their discussion of the text and not be a separate section or 'add-on' to the essay.
- Handwriting that is difficult to read can make awarding a mark very difficult. It is always worth considering whether candidates might fare better if they use a word processor.

## A LEVEL ENGLISH LITERATURE

### General Certificate of Education

Summer 2022

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### UNIT 5: PROSE STUDY (NEA)

#### General Comments

To say that the past two years have made the Prose Study component ‘challenging’ would be somewhat of an understatement. It is greatly to the credit of candidates, therefore, that they were able to produce on schedule extended responses which were relevant, engaged and coherently written. The vast majority of moderation samples arrived promptly and in very good order, a testament to the teachers’ commitment and professionalism. Moderators were impressed by the hard work of the candidates and the dedication of their teachers which made possible the success of this unit, despite the problems posed by conditions beyond their control. It was universally felt among moderators that centres should be proud of the way they have responded to very difficult circumstances and done their utmost to promote their students’ best interests.

Moderators read some excellent work as these short extracts from centre reports indicate:

- *‘The centre’s considered approach to text selection and task setting allowed all the candidates across the ability to fulfil their potential which was excellent practice.’*
- *‘The candidate’s essay was a very interesting and creative exploration of the ways in which both writers had presented the topic, made possible by thorough knowledge of the novels.’*
- *‘It really was a pleasure to read such engaged and mature responses.’*

#### Areas of Concern

It was perhaps inevitable, however, that some progress made since the introduction of this NEA component would be affected when centres were not able to receive individual feedback on their candidates’ work. There was a feeling among moderators that some ground gained in key areas, especially in task setting to ensure a literary focus, had been lost since the last external moderation process in 2019.

Hopefully, the next academic year will be much more settled for students and teachers, but in the wake of such upheaval, perhaps this would be a good time for all centres to review how they prepare students for the Prose Study, reflecting and building on existing good practice but also being willing to identify areas for development.

To that end, this report will address **four key issues** in the hope of regaining some of the lost ground, helping centres to approach the Prose Study with a renewed spirit of enthusiasm:

- **The vital importance of task setting to ensure a literary response**
- **The quality of analysis and critical appreciation**
- **Over-reliance on on-line study resources**
- **Making assessment secure.**

## Comments on individual questions/sections

### 1. Task setting

This has undoubtedly proven to be a more important factor in candidate success than the choice of texts. The vast majority of centres whose marks were adjusted were those where the wording of titles did not help candidates sustain a literary perspective or allow them to meet higher band criteria.

Unfortunately, there was an increased prevalence of **context-led or issue-based questions** taking candidates away from critical appreciation of the texts as literary works and inviting them instead to use the texts as illustrations of ideas, theories or social conditions, affecting performance in all AOs. Even for AO3, the candidates were not demonstrating a 'sound, secure understanding of the connections between text and context', and marks given solely to reward the amount of contextual material in response to titles like these were often inflated:

- *'The system of social hierarchy is used as a form of oppression to dehumanise those that are materially deprived'. In light of this, compare how both authors portray class as repressive in their novels Wuthering Heights and Atonement*
- *'Social attitudes had deleterious effects on people of the 1940s and the Victorian era'. How do the writers present this in their novels?'*
- *'Achieving femininity is more about the ability to express yourself as opposed to society-imposed gender expectations.' To what extent do the female characters in The Color Purple and Girl Meets Boy strive to challenge and remove the shackles of a misogynistic, heteronormative society*

This was especially concerning as these unhelpful, non-literary titles often seemed to reflect the way the candidates had been taught to approach the novels. It appeared as if **texts had been selected with an 'issue' in mind**, rooted most frequently in a sociological rather than a literary connection, often meaning the candidates had viewed the novels from a limited, even reductive standpoint from the outset. Although the wording of the titles varied slightly, the candidates in quite a lot of centres were all effectively responding to the same task centring on the 'issue' at hand such as:

- racial inequality in *The Color Purple* and *The Help*
- class barriers in *The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement*
- patriarchal repression in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Power*

While this might well have been exacerbated this year by the difficult circumstances teachers were working under, it is an approach which has been advised against in the past and one which we would want to emphasise as problematic.

This issue-led approach was especially problematic in the **very popular focus on gender, especially female repression**. More than a third of all titles focused on the notion of patriarchal oppression, imposing some very narrow interpretations on such diverse texts as *The Road*, *1984* and *Pride and Prejudice*. In the latter case this entailed writing as if novel ended half-way, with Lizzie's spirited, proto-feminist rejection of the patriarchal oppressor Darcy's proposal at Hunsford; the candidates seemed unaware that they actually married at the end!

Given that this is such a loaded and contentious issue in the time of #MeToo, it can be more difficult to encourage candidates to focus their interest and energy on interrogating the texts rather than using them as a springboard to discuss the rights and wrongs of the gender debate per se. As one moderator commented, *'Having seen so many responses focusing on female repression, I'm beginning to wonder if novelists wrote about anything else for the last two hundred years'*. Might it actually be time to consider a temporary moratorium on the evils of toxic masculinity so that candidates are not having to battle with such unhelpful titles as these:

- *"Female identity is defined by romantic relationships with men". With this statement in mind compare and contrast the ways in which Forster and Adichie blame patriarchal conditioning for female dissatisfaction with relationships and within themselves.*
- *How far do you agree that the suppression of everyday life and the struggles of traditional woman stereotypes have held back the characters in A Room With A View and Brooklyn?*

**Some titles were inaccessible or simply unintelligible** as if the candidates who devised them were straining for sophistication. WJEC guidance has always stressed the wording of titles should not be left to the candidate alone but must involve some liaison with the teacher in crafting a question which will target all the AOs. The use of a critical view has been recommended as a way to help candidates initiate a debate for AO5 and organise ideas into a line of argument for AO1. However, this is worthless if the title is worded in a way that the candidate doesn't fully understand with a statement which is either a hindrance or simply ignored.

- *'Both female protagonists demonstrate the exertion of pressure upon the relative epochal standards, illustrating the dichotomous shift between the notions of conformity and rebellion; their respective societies both restrict and encourage the finding of liberation.'* *In light of this statement, compare and contrast the ways in which the duality of limitation and defiance are presented in Brooklyn and A Room with A View.*

Using a **loosely related aphorism** taken from Brainyquotes might lend some superficial veneer of sophistication but, rather than the critical view of the texts recommended, this type of quoted statement was rarely helpful to the candidate in engaging with the texts from a literary perspective, especially when there seemed to be a disconnect with the steering element in the question:

- *'Love isn't something you have to deserve' Jennifer Echols*  
*Explore the juxtaposition of the expectation and privilege of love that is woven throughout The Great Gatsby and Atonement*

Using **philosophical or sociological statements** can obviously make it more likely that the candidate is going to take a non-literary approach. At times very confident candidates were writing with impressive eloquence about philosophical or psychological theory rather than the texts, as encouraged by their titles:

- *"Crowds are somewhat like the Sphinx of ancient fable: it is necessary to arrive at a solution of the problems offered by their psychology or to resign ourselves to being devoured by them" (Gustave le Bon) Discuss the ways in which both authors present concerns about human psychology in The Handmaid's Tale and Millennium People.*

**Effective task setting is not easy but it is fundamental to success** when candidates are writing 3,500 words and a whole unit's marks rest on one question. Devising helpful titles was made more difficult by unavoidable interruption to study this year, but its importance must be recognised for future cohorts. The range and literary relevance of topics offered, and how they are worded as titles to help the candidates, should be subject to constant review and refinement in an efficient, self-reflective department. The following advice taken from moderators' reports would be a useful starting-point for such a process.

**Advice:**

- **Avoid selecting texts based on a common 'issue'** or teach with that single idea in mind. We would never approach exam texts in such a narrow, reductive way. *Hamlet* isn't 'about' madness; Donne isn't just a 'love poet'.
- Ensure the candidates have a range of **literary topics** to explore when comparing the texts and are not viewing them from a contextual or issue-based perspective.
- **Approach the specific wording of titles as a crucial element** in success, one that must not be left to candidates to devise on their own.
- In most cases a **critical view of the texts**, ideally crafted by the teacher in close liaison with the candidate, is a useful way to narrow the focus so it is manageable and promotes a literary perspective. If the candidate would struggle to engage with the view, however, a more straightforward approach might be advisable so that the wording of the task is not another obstacle to overcome.
- Try to discourage candidates from tackling tasks on **wide-ranging, amorphous and loaded issues** which moderators warn will make it more difficult for them to sustain a literary approach to the texts: *social class; identity; truth/reality; gender; race*
- **Consult WJEC advice** on task setting and the wording of titles in previous years' CPD materials and Principal Moderator's reports.
- Look carefully at **WJEC exam questions as a masterclass** in effective task setting.

## **2. The quality of critical appreciation and analysis of technique**

Following on from task setting and the emphasis on a literary approach, there was **concerning evidence of AO2 being side-lined by AO3 and AO5**. In any literary response, engaging with the craft of the writers should be firmly to the fore of the response, with contextual influences and other interpretations used to *support* and enhance critical appreciation of the texts rather than driving the argument. If essays are dominated by contextual information taken from historical and socio-political sources or, as one moderator put it, '*flooded with generalised critical theory*', there is not enough direct focus on the works to meet higher band criteria and analysis of the way meaning is shaped becomes effectively 'squeezed'. Claims are not fully supported or developed sufficiently enough to make them convincing but are merely asserted.

It was dismaying to see rather a **limited sense of the texts as novels**, as highly crafted, extended works in which ideas, events and characters progress. The texts were often viewed instead almost as if static, with characters set in time, so the candidates could 'stab' at the texts in any order to find 'evidence' to support their claims. It was interesting how often candidates jumped straight to the middle of texts or even the end to 'prove' their points with little apparent sense of the importance of structure or progression.

As the candidates have already studied a pre-1900 novel in some detail for Unit 1, we might expect to see them engaging with a range of 'prose devices', as indicated in the AO2 criteria, but there was relatively limited evidence of consideration of features such as: *narrative voice; authorial intervention; mood; tone; atmosphere; setting; imagery patterns and motifs; symbolism; contrasts and structural choices; beginnings and endings*, etc. Instead, there **was a worrying tendency to micro-analyse relatively short quotations at word level, often a single sentence, pinning complex meaning on a few words or even minor effects** such as punctuation or the use of sound effects:

- *'The business of her life was to get her daughters married; its solace was visiting and news'. By her use of the semi-colon Austen demonstrates Mrs Bennet's vulgarity.*

It was particularly noticeable this year that many candidates focused a lot on the importance of pronouns, again perhaps reflecting the significance of this as a contemporary 'issue' rather than a literary device. This almost exclusive focus on word-level use was mentioned in previous reports as a worrying development but has become more prevalent.

At times, candidates were merely **paraphrasing or even defining** words' meaning but seemed to feel they were analysing and evaluating effects, perhaps reassured by another concerning tendency to **'label' word classes**:

- *'...the use of the high register, receptive noun 'glaucoma' connotes difficulty here...';*
- *'The adverb 'quickly' before the collective noun 'flock' emphasises the speed'*

While this might be an after-effect of GCSE, candidates need to be aware that the simple 'naming of parts', without explaining how the use of techniques has shaped meaning, is not rewarded, even under AO1 which credits the **relevant application of literary terminology**. For instance, what is gained by mentioning the use of the asyndetic list in this quotation from one candidate's work?

- *"The simplistic descriptions such as the asyndetic triplet 'softly coloured worlds of human love, the song of birds, the sun' are made vivid by the endless grey the Man faces.'*

Some candidates demonstrated **limited knowledge of the whole texts**, which again might have been exacerbated by the situation this year, but surely 'sound and secure' analysis depends on a reasonable degree of whole text knowledge, let alone 'confident' and 'perceptive'? Candidates who seemed able only to refer to certain sections of the texts were less likely to meet these criteria. It was disappointingly clear that **some candidates had clearly not reread or studied the texts**, and this definitely affected the quality of their critical appreciation of the writers' craft.

There was an increased tendency to **view characters as if they were real people** and to describe their actions and feelings in a commentary style, rather than looking beyond surface events to the writer behind. Once again, this 'real people' approach was at times invited by the candidate's title:

- *How have female characters in The Color Purple and Atonement overcome childhood trauma and how has this affected their childhoods?*
- *"It is so much safer not to feel, not to let the world touch me." Discuss how Plath in The Bell Jar and Evaristo in Girl, Woman, Other present female identity and how it impacts the psychological state.*

The problem was made worse when the candidates were trying to **compare a novel with a memoir**, such as Lorna Sage's *Bad Blood* or Jeanette Winterson's *Why Be Happy..?*, and seemed unsure how to distinguish between constructed characters and the real life experiences of the writer.

As with all the comments made in relation to this year's submissions, it must be acknowledged that the teaching and reinforcement of advanced analytical skills takes time and more conducive circumstances than many centres were able to rely on in the recent period. The advice below relating to promoting AO2 skills is therefore intended to be helpful to centres reflecting on their procedures and identifying areas for development in the future.

### Advice

- It can be perhaps easy to overestimate how much candidates understand about the novel form, and it might be worthwhile making sure that they have a reasonable grasp of the genre before starting study of their chosen texts. Good practice in some centres involves **revisiting of the novel form** (or short story/memoir, etc) and its conventions in contrast to other genres or prose types.
- Ensure that teaching of the texts **promotes the concept of nuanced, multi-faceted meaning** rather than novels having one set idea to dictate.
- **Encourage rereading of the texts**, an uphill battle when literature students are sadly not always keen readers, but it might work if candidates are assured that it is the best way to boost their marks. (It seems wrong to suggest this, but if a text has sufficient literary weight and challenge, and has been approved, a shorter one might be more accessible for reluctant readers).
- Along with rereading, somewhat **old-fashioned study skills can be worth inculcating**, such as: keeping quotation banks; plotting character maps; tracing imagery and symbolism patterns, etc. The process itself helps to consolidate knowledge and understanding.
- **Discourage micro-analysis** and pinning large claims on flimsy evidence. Model how to make a more convincing case by developing points with further evidence. There are WJEC resources under CPD materials demonstrating this which some centres have found useful.
- Use extracts **from good examples in the standardising responses** to show effective analysis and to contrast with examples from less successful ones.

### 3. Over-reliance on on-line study sites

It is an uncomfortable reality that the **candidates were even more heavily reliant on low-value on-line resources than in previous years**. Once again, the difficult circumstances would certainly have been a factor here. Candidates having to work more independently than they or their teachers would like might well have lacked confidence in tackling challenging prose works. This may have encouraged them to rush to 'lit.charts', 'sparknotes' and a bewildering array of sites promising easy answers and short cuts.

Providing these materials is sadly a thriving business nowadays and they can appear a very attractive alternative to the hard graft of careful rereading and study. Some candidates seemed totally unaware how to make use of these sites and quoted long chunks from them, both attributed and unattributed, and even referenced extracts as if they were insightful critiques made by literary critics. Most worryingly of all, the candidates started to ape the style and approach of these sites which affected their marks and made it more difficult for teachers to assess their work accurately.

Of course, teachers cannot reverse time and restrict access to these materials, but it is **important to make candidates aware of their limitations** and many drawbacks:

- These materials are **not designed to answer specific, personalised essay titles** but to help candidates of all abilities understand the broad events and ideas in the texts. The people who write them are not being assessed by the WJEC AOs.
- They tend to be as concise and straightforward as possible, so rarely provide detailed evidence but instead **make simplified, assertive claims**.
- They largely consist of relatively straightforward commentaries of what happens, peppered with some brief textual support and occasional analysis. They **tend to be descriptive, even narrative**, and unwary candidates can easily fall into the trap of writing in the same generalised commentary-style rather than engaging with the craft of the writer.
- Part of their appeal as textual guides is the absence of nuance and ambiguity, because they promise to make challenging texts more accessible. For this reason, they are **often simplistic and one-dimensional**, making it easier for candidates by presenting complex novels as being ‘about’ a few, easily labelled ‘themes’.
- They tend to **pronounce, using definite statements**, without the tentative tone needed to convey a mature awareness of the texts’ subtleties which is an important feature of an appropriate academic register in this subject.
- They often **refer to the characters as ‘real people’**, sometimes neglecting to mention the writers at all because literary analysis is much more demanding than describing what characters do and feel.
- The way the materials seem to promise all to the candidates, condensing complex meaning into neat topic areas (characters; themes; imagery; devices) means the candidates feel they don’t need to do any of this ‘studying’ for themselves. The reliance on study sites makes it **even less likely that they will reread** and gain the secure or confident knowledge of the texts which will allow them to engage fully or creatively in their responses.
- Although candidates live in an electronic world and are well-versed in on-line technology, this does not mean that they are equipped to distinguish what is worthwhile in the **bewildering amount of material** they are faced with. (Try Googling ‘the narrator in *The Great Gatsby* as an example of the sheer weight of so-called support on offer).
- Some may be tempted to go behind the pay walls where all sorts of **promises of short cuts to success** are in place to lure them into very dangerous waters...

Much as it might be tempting to turn a blind eye to the overuse of these sites, they are not going away and it is best to be upfront with candidates from the outset. Spending some time on helping candidates develop helpful study skills at the start of the course could definitely yield benefits later on.

### Advice

- **Give guidance on how best to make use of these sites as a starting point** for study and recommend the more helpful ones. Remind them that not everything they read on the internet is of high quality!
- **Introduce them to more worthy critical opinions** of texts and help them distinguish between textual commentary which explains what is happening, and literary criticism which illuminates the texts by helping us view them from a fresh, informed, literary standpoint.

- Wean candidates off study sites and **encourage instead rereading** to embed knowledge of texts. One analogy might be that sifting through all those vague summaries of the texts is like listening to a radio commentary of a football match rather than watching it live.
- **Remind them of the commercial impetus** behind these sites and how they are advertised to exploit candidates' anxieties.
- Warn of the **very serious consequences of plagiarism**. Remind candidates of the need to attribute all sources and how they need to put any material from on-line sites in own words if they are going to use it.

#### 4. Accurate Assessment

All moderators were able to report on examples of good practice in the marking of candidates' work which was a credit to the teachers involved. As this comment from one moderator shows, there was admiration for the teachers working under such difficult conditions:

- *'In many cases, centres had clearly taken action to address issues raised in previous reports and had worked very hard to develop and refine their practice, although there were still a few who didn't do much in the way of annotating or internal moderation. It's hard to know exactly how much time and opportunity some departments had for this, however, with lots of pressure this year just trying to get the students back on course and reacquainted with study habits?'*

However, not all centres' marking was accurate and some adjustments were unfortunately necessary to bring marks into line with agreed standards, causing disappointment for candidates. Such action is never taken lightly, and before any adjustment, the candidates' work is seen by at least two moderators, one at senior level.

In centres where the marking was insecure, there was usually evidence of less effective practice and in many cases this had already been raised as a cause for concern in previous moderator's reports:

- **Sparse annotation** with very little guidance to support the primary marker in making reliable judgments relating to five AOs across 3,500 words.
- **Limited explanation** to justify marks awarded to secondary markers or moderators.
- Centres using only **AO markers unaccompanied by band descriptors** to demonstrate evaluative judgements
- A **discrepancy** between the on-script annotation and the final marks awarded
- **Very brief summative comments** on the actual work and the official coversheet
- A policy **of pushing candidates' marks to the top of the band** in every AO instead of fine-tuning within the band as recommended.
- **Limited evidence of internal moderation**, sometimes consisting solely of the comment 'Agreed' and the secondary marker's signature.
- **Marks adjusted upwards** by a secondary marker without any explanation

To avoid adjustment, there is best practice in the most successful centres which all can adopt in order to do the best for their candidates.

## Advice

- Before marking their own candidates' work, **all teachers involved should reread at least one example at each band level in the WJEC standardising materials** on the secure website, and ideally discuss these with fellow-markers. These are the standards the moderators will apply so it is important to adhere as closely as possible to them as a primary marker.
- Markers should also **refer to the previous moderator's report** to consider any advice on assessment provided.
- **Annotation should be consistent, detailed** and not confined to an occasional tick and/or AO marker. These should be accompanied by descriptors from the assessment criteria to support decisions, such as AO5 '*acknowledges views*' AO3 '*clear connection*'; AO2 '*secure analysis*'; AO4 '*illuminating/productive*', etc.
- In centres where the assessment is most secure, the markers are often willing to **acknowledge weaker areas as well as highlighting strengths** in their candidates' work
- Encouraging candidates to use **double spacing** can make room for detailed and targeted annotation.
- In many successful centres, markers write **individual summative comments** at the end of the response and make specific reference to the criteria in supporting comments on the coversheet.
- While it is acceptable to give candidates encouraging feedback on their final draft, it's important to keep the moderator in mind when annotating and to **make sure comments are supporting the marks awarded**.
- Dual marking or cross moderation is invaluable but should involve some **meaningful dialogue between markers** rather than a simple rubber stamping of the primary marker's original decision. This kind of discussion about the criteria can reassure the moderator that the marks have been carefully considered and also inspire faith in the rigour of the centre's assessment procedures.
- Some smaller centres where dual marking is not feasible **refer to specific standardising exemplar** as reference points to support decisions.
- Rather than automatically pushing to the top of the band **the most accurate markers fine-tune marks with the band**. Awarding candidates marks at the top in every AO, when they might have been more appropriately placed in the middle or lower end, can quickly add up to an overly generous total and post-moderation adjustment.

There is a small number of centres whose marks have been adjusted every year because the assessment is too generous. It is now a matter of some urgency that these centres review and improve their assessment procedures in order to avoid still further disappointment for their candidates.

## A few final points

***The Great Gatsby* and *Atonement*** continues to be a popular text combination but it might be time to reconsider pairing these two challenging and complex novels. Less confident candidates tend to struggle with two such nuanced and demanding texts and often demonstrate quite a partial or superficial understanding of one or both.

Using **two dystopian texts**, such as *1984* and *The Circle* or *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Never Let Me Go* can make it difficult for candidates to see anything except the generic features. The result is often a descriptive approach, detailing the evils of both repressive regimes and treating them as real, rather than analysing the writers' individual literary choices. For example, candidates responding to Atwood's novel rarely, if ever, tackle her presentation of the narrator or the importance of other key characters such as Serena Joy, Aunt Lydia, The Commander or Nick, but usually restrict their focus to describing the worst excesses of Gilead. While the vast majority of responses to this text focus on female repression, one centre's approach to task setting allowed the candidates to look beyond the 'issue' to the writer's conscious crafting with topics including the presentation of: *the myth of sisterhood; male vulnerability; the triumph of endurance; the power of passion; the unreliable narrator* etc. This focus on the text as a novel, rather than a discourse on the horrors of the Patriarchy or simply a 'dystopian text', was helped by pairing it with a range of non-dystopian post-2000 texts including: *The Secret Scripture; Americanah; The Underground Railroad; Milkman and The Silence of the Girls*.

One issue raised by a lot of moderators was **the prevalence of contextual material in candidates' bibliographies** and the relative scarcity of good quality, print-based literary critiques of the texts. Not only was this further indication of an emphasis on context rather than the texts, but moderators commented on how often reference to these non-literary sources was rewarded under AO5 rather than the more likely AO3, which also affected the accuracy of the marking.

While it can be helpful to apply **schools of thought** as an alternative reading to the texts, it can be a very blunt instrument and should perhaps be used sparingly. In some responses, just as the candidates were starting to interrogate the text in some detail, considering how and why the writer was shaping meaning, this was interrupted by a long list of different, quite assertive theoretical stances: '*A Marxist critic would view this as... while a feminist would interpret it as... A new historicist approach to this would be to... but a critical race theorist would see it as..., unlike a Masculine studies critic who would...*'. Balancing the AOs is very challenging, but it is always best to help the candidates avoid '*flooding their work with critical theory*' which tends to divert them from close focus on the works themselves.

**Effective paragraphing** seems to be a dying art and it might be worth spending a little time on promoting their use to help candidates structure their material into a coherent line of argument.

Lots of responses would have benefited from more **careful proofreading and editing**, especially those at over 4,000 words which were far too long and nearly always self-penalising. The recommended word count of 2,500 to 3,500 words is intended to give all the same opportunity to develop their arguments in the interests of fairness and it is an important academic skill for candidates to select and organise material into a concise, focused line of argument.

## Conclusion

Although this report has focused on areas for improvement, hopefully the achievement and dedication of candidates and teachers in extremely challenging circumstances have been recognised and appreciated. Many centres will be extremely gratified by the moderator's praise and commendation in their individual reports.

As a final thought, it struck several moderators that, as candidates are sadly growing up in increasingly dark and troubled times, this might be an opportunity to reconsider some of the topics we recommend they pursue for this component. As students of English Literature, their inner lives could be enriched and uplifted by engaging more intently on the skill of the writers in portraying the human experience, the appreciation which drew us as teachers to the subject, and by celebrating the pleasure and reassurance that reading can bring. As one moderator put it:

*'So much unrelenting misery. Where is the joy?'*

### **Summary of key points**

- Reviewing and refining task setting, and the specific wording of titles, should be an on-going process.
- Candidates must be guided towards a literary perspective, rather than a reductive context- or issue-led one, with AO2 to the fore, not AO3.
- Candidates should avoid too much micro-analysis at word level of short quotations, and consider instead the use and effect of a range of prose devices,
- Candidates need guidance to avoid over-reliance on poor quality online study sites and should be encouraged instead to reread the texts rather than what somebody on the internet has said about them.
- Departments might reflect on their current assessment procedures and consider how to adopt best practice to make marking as accurate as possible.



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