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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCE (NEW)  
ENGLISH LITERATURE  
AS/Advanced**

**SUMMER 2017**

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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WJEC  
GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE (New)  
Summer 2017  
UNIT 1: PROSE AND DRAMA

**Unit 1: Prose and Drama**

**General Comments**

There were many excellent responses to a variety of texts; examiners were impressed with the sophistication and breadth of some responses and the ways in which these candidates effectively planned and structured their work. Nevertheless, some candidates were too reliant on pre-prepared essay plans and did not engage with all AOs. Indeed, it is important that centres pay attention to the weightings of the AOs and ensure that, in addition to analysing the ways meanings are shaped (AO2), candidates also explore the influence of relevant contexts (AO4) and make use of relevant alternative readings (AO5).

*Jane Eyre* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* were, by far, the most popular texts but it was pleasing to see an increase in the number of candidates studying *North and South*, *David Copperfield* and *Top Girls*.

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

**Extract**

**(i) AO1**

- Candidates must clearly engage with, and track through, the given extract. Once again, some candidates drifted into making irrelevant comments about other parts of the text, context or alternative viewpoints. It should be remembered that AO3 and AO5 are not assessed for part (i).
- Some candidates lost focus on the question and drifted away from, for example, the **relationship** between two characters to talk generally about characterisation.
- Some candidates lacked critical engagement with the extract and began re-telling the plot. Although it can be effective to briefly place the extract in context (i.e. where it takes place in the novel), irrelevant narrative detail is self-penalising.
- As stated in the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 paper, it is advised that **20 minutes** is spent on Section A, part (i). A significant minority of candidates spent too long on this question which affected the quality of their part (ii) response. It is advised that centres provide candidates with timed practice to avoid timing issues.

**(i) AO2**

- It was pleasing to see many candidates comment on writers' techniques, in addition to the use of language, when analysing how meaning is created. However, some candidates slipped into a narrative re-telling of the extract using quotations without analysis. In such cases, there was little to reward for AO2.

## Essay

### (iii) AO1

- It is important that candidates complete timed essay practice so that timing, under exam conditions, is not an issue. Effective planning is also vital for candidates to produce a concise and clearly structured essay. There was some evidence of planning where candidates had taken time to think about their approach to answering the question.
- There was a balance of responses whereby some candidates chose to focus on character while others explored two separate parts of the novel: both are valid approaches.
- Centres should advise candidates that the extract should be used as a 'springboard' into their essay and that textual references from the extract are to be discouraged. In some cases, candidates simply re-visited the extract with little reference to other parts of the text.
- In a minority of cases candidates relied too heavily on writing pre-rehearsed responses which did not 'fit' the question. Centres must encourage pupils to take an individual and independent response to the specific question.
- Expression continued to raise some concerns, especially the use of a colloquial register and candidates' inability to maintain an academic discourse (e.g. using 'of' instead of 'have'). Centres should also discourage candidates from using terms taken from English Language – phrases such as lexical sets, semantic field, asyndetic listing etc. – as this often hindered literary analysis.
- Candidates should be conscious of embedding their contextual references (AO3), critical views (AO5) and their supporting comments from the text (AO2) with subtlety, clearly linking to the topic in question. Some candidates lacked both sophistication and relevance when attempting to integrate critical views and contextual information.

### (ii) AO2

- As with the extract responses, a significant minority of candidates embedded quotations without discussing how meaning is created, producing a narrative-driven response. These candidates often scored highly for concepts (AO1) but were less successful with their analysis (AO2).
- Centres should advise candidates that, although this is a closed book exam, they are expected to integrate and analyse relevant quotations from across the text.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5.

### (ii) AO3

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- Centres should advise candidates that the most successful responses made a close link between contextual detail and the text. Indeed, the strongest responses linked specific contextual ideas to specific textual quotations.
- Once again, due to the heavier weighting of this AO, a significant number of candidates wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of extraneous contextual information. Contextual reference, including biographical detail, cannot be rewarded for its own sake. Candidates are advised to use the formula: 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than engulfs their response.

**(ii) AO5**

- Similarly to AO3, candidates must use other relevant opinion to **inform** their own discussion of the text and build a **personal response**. Indeed, some candidates quoted lengthy irrelevant critical quotations and did not fully integrate them into their own reading.
- 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'). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.
- It was, however, pleasing to see more autonomous candidates take the opportunity to engage with relevant critical opinion in order to link it directly to their own appreciation of the text.

**Notes on Texts**

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

There were some insightful responses to the extract with candidates generally acknowledging the vulnerability of Colonel Brandon. The majority of candidates explored Austen's use of language to convey a tone of distress while a few successfully commented on the structure of the passage, analysing how Brandon's sensitivity is set in contrast to his brother. In terms of the essay question, the more successful responses analysed **how** marriage is presented by Austen to 'criticise society' rather than simply list the different marriages in the text. There was, unfortunately, a tendency to focus exclusively on biographical detail for context which limited the success of the response.

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

Once again, *Jane Eyre* was, by far, the most popular choice of pre-1900 prose texts across Wales. Although many candidates engaged completely with the forceful and selfish presentation of St John, some candidates either became side-tracked by irrelevant contextual detail about mid-Victorian missionaries or drifted away from the question to focus on the presentation of Jane. With regards to the essay's focus on Victorian Christianity being depicted in an 'unfavourable light', weaker candidates attempted to 'shoe horn' in irrelevant detail about Mr Rochester and his relationship with Bertha with little attention paid to the question. On the other hand, the more successful responses engaged in an exploration of both the favourable and unfavourable depictions of Christianity and this often led to a contextually informed discussion. Indeed, candidates' answers were strongest when they analysed authorial techniques, with valid support, and then linked to contextual information or critical views to build a coherent argument. Centres should take note that bland, sweeping statements about religion did very little to allow candidates to access the top bands.

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

It was pleasing to see an increase in popularity in centres choosing to study this pre-1900 text and responses were, on the whole, sophisticated and insightful. The majority of candidates explored the emotional suffering of Mr Thornton while many analysed both the psychological and physical impact of Margaret's refusal. The essay question was generally handled well, with the majority of candidates focusing upon the various characters' attitudes towards traditional gender roles and the way these ideas are presented by Gaskell. Those who offered a range of different power struggles also tended to score highly for AO3 as it allowed them to draw upon various contexts.

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

There were some thoughtful and detailed responses to the extract with many candidates identifying Mr Peggotty's language of tenderness and the way this presented him in a vulnerable and almost tragic light. Some candidates also explored the way the structure of the passage is built around the contrasting sense of family unity and tragic isolation of Emily, guiding the reader's response to sympathy for Mr Peggotty. Weaker candidates, however, lost focus on Mr Peggotty and explored the dialogue of David, drawing upon irrelevant parts of the text. In terms of the essay question, as with the other set texts, the most successful responses developed a response to the specific question. These candidates, therefore, explored the different kinds of 'loss' and 'shame' in the novel, rather than tracking through the text and offering examples of each. Those who analysed a range of examples also tended to score more highly for AO3.

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

This was a popular choice of text and examiners saw some excellent and varied responses. The majority of responses identified the tension between Henchard and Elizabeth-Jane and the way their relationship is based on male authority and female submission. The less successful responses, however, lost focus on the **relationship** between the two characters, commenting instead on the presentation of Henchard in both the extract and throughout the text as a whole. With regards to the essay, for the most part, candidates engaged well with the question and its statement that 'Hardy presents a society preoccupied with reputation and status', with the majority of responses focusing upon the wife sale and Lucetta's relationship with Henchard.

### **Section B: Drama**

#### **AO1**

- As stated on the 'information for candidates' section on the front cover of the Unit 1 exam paper, it is advised that candidates spend **40 minutes** on Section B. Strict timings are essential in Section A in order to prevent candidates from running out of time and producing brief and underdeveloped responses for Section B.
- Weaker responses listed dramatic techniques with little comment on the dramatic effect. Such responses inevitably lacked clarity and relevance.

#### **AO2**

- A significant number of candidates embedded textual quotations without discussing **how** meaning is created. These essays tended to slip into a narrative re-telling of the play which undermined critical engagement.
- Some candidates wrote with confidence on language but did not pay attention to the effect of either the structure of the play or the use of dramatic devices such as the stage directions, lighting or music.
- It is worth noting that some of the more successful responses used AO2 as an anchor for AO3 and AO5.

#### **AO3**

- The strongest responses remained focused on the **significance** and **influence** of contexts, using **relevant** information to construct an analytical discussion of the text.
- As with Section A, weaker candidates wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of pre-rehearsed extraneous contextual information. Contextual reference, including biographical detail, must be relevant and cannot be rewarded for its own sake. Centres are to advise candidates to use the formula 'task-text-context' to ensure that context informs rather than engulfs the response.

## AO5

- A 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’). These candidates can only be awarded zero marks for this AO.

## Notes on Texts

### Christopher Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus*

As with the 2016 series, this proved to be a popular choice of text with a balance of candidates responding to both questions. Indeed, examiners saw some sophisticated and perceptive responses with candidates clearly engaging with the question’s critical quotation, using it as a ‘springboard’ into AO5. In regard to Q6, a large number of strong responses focused on the way the slapstick scene with the Pope is used as a satire against Roman Catholicism while successfully weaving in relevant contextual information. Unfortunately, however, lengthy paragraphs focused on Christopher Marlowe’s religious beliefs were far too prevalent in some responses and, in a minority, completely dominated the essays. A reliance on pre-rehearsed biographical information was also a feature of a minority of responses to Q7 although it was pleasing to see many candidates engaging with the idea of different audiences and the effect of dramatic technique.

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

For the limited number of candidates responding to this late-Victorian text, there was not a marked difference in popularity between Q8 and Q9 and examiners read some detailed and thoughtful responses. The strongest responses to Q8 fully engaged with Wilde’s hypocritical presentation of London Society, exploring the depiction of Mrs Erylne and the complexities of her relationships with both men and women. The character of Mrs Erylne was also the focus of many Q9 responses although less successful candidates wandered away from discussing **how** Wilde makes use of the rules of social behaviour and slipped into a narrative retelling of the play.

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

This was, by far, the most popular choice of drama text with the majority of candidates opting to answer Q11. Indeed, there were some confident and thoughtful discussions of the way Williams presents 1940s New Orleans as a society lacking in kindness with stronger answers containing a precise focus on the effect of dramatic technique as well as language. Q10 also produced some sensitive responses with many candidates choosing to focus on the complex depiction of both Stanley and Blanche. Indeed, the stronger responses followed the task-text-context formula, linking relevant contextual information to close analysis of language and dramatic technique. Unfortunately, however, a minority of responses wandered away from the question to produce lengthy paragraphs of irrelevant biographical information with some descriptive comment.

### Caryl Churchill: *Top Girls*

It was pleasing to see an increase in the number of centres choosing to study ‘Top Girls’ and examiners saw some excellent responses. Indeed, many candidates successfully engaged

with Q12's critical opinion and confidently discussed the notion that "success is always accompanied by unpopularity", choosing to focus on Marlene and her volatile relationship with both Joyce and Angie. Q13 also produced some perceptive responses which purposefully placed *Top Girls* in context to explore the effect of female suffering on the audience. A minority of candidates, however, ignored the question's emphasis on **dramatic** tension which prevented them accessing the higher bands for AO2.

### **Joe Orton: *Loot***

For the limited number of candidates who had studied *Loot*, there was not a marked difference in popularity between the two questions and examiners read some very successful answers. The strongest responses to Q14 focused on staging as well as dialogue to explore the way Orton uses black comedy to make a social comment while weaker candidates simply narrated the farcical episodes. This was also the case for the less successful responses to Q15 as a minority of answers simply listed examples of shocking behaviour. It was, however, pleasing to see many candidates explore the **effect** of anti-social characters such as, for example, Truscott and Fay to clearly analyse **how** dramatic tension is created.

**WJEC**  
**GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE (New)**  
**Summer 2017**  
**UNIT 2: POETRY POST-1900**

**General Comments**

In the second year of examining, it was pleasing to see that many centres had acted upon last year's report and that some weaknesses in responses have been addressed. Yet again, some highly sophisticated and mature answers were seen and there seemed to be a better focus on the balance of AOs in general. Some candidates had answered Section B before A, possibly aware that they could run out of time, but no major issues were caused by that approach. Although this year's papers were not scanned for electronic marking, handwriting continued to be a problem for some candidates, especially when approaching the latter stages of the exam. Therefore, we would like to reiterate our advice for centres to provide more timed practices to avoid rushed and undecipherable responses.

Duffy and Larkin were again the most popular choice of poets although Sheers and Heaney are gaining in popularity. A minority of centres choose to study Thomas and Lewis but very few Lawrence and Clarke responses were seen.

**Section A: Critical Analysis**

Many perceptive responses were seen with some writing in great detail and length for the time allowed. However, some highly mature answers were concise and sharply focused. We again remind candidates to spend no more than 45 minutes on Section A as it is worth only half the marks of Section B which has 80 marks on offer.

It was again disappointing to note some candidates including lengthy references to contextual detail in this section as it is clearly noted that only AO1 and AO2 are assessed.

**AO1**

- Last year's report highlighted the tendency of some candidates to write a general analysis of the named poem instead of focusing on the theme stated in the question. Happily, examiners saw far fewer examples of this approach this year.
- 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. It was also disappointing to see the mislabelling of basic parts of speech by many candidates.
- Informality in register and tone was still a problem for many candidates. We would kindly remind them to refer to the poets by their surnames.
- It is again recommended that candidates are discouraged from using linguistic terminology usually seen in English Language A level as it frequently hampers literary analysis. Some terms, of course, overlap but some essays were hampered by excessive (and not always correct) use of linguistic terminology.

## **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.

### **Q1. Edward Thomas**

There were some confident and thoughtful responses to the question with stronger answers containing a precise focus on the urgent tone and regimented structure as well as Thomas' use of language. Contextual details of Thomas' experiences in the First World War were also far too prevalent in some responses and, in a minority, dominated the essay.

### **Q2. Alun Lewis**

This was a less popular question in Section A than Q 1. Nevertheless, some responses offered a perceptive analysis of the poem and it was pleasing to see different but valid interpretations of the text. A small number dwelt for too long on Lewis' experiences in India and the Far East.

### **Q3. D H Lawrence**

Very few candidates responded to this question although there were some very sound answers dealing with Lawrence's use of imagery and the poetic voice.

### **Q4. Gillian Clarke**

A very limited number of candidates attempted this question but some dealt well with Clarke's use of colour imagery and art's historical importance. Stronger answers commented on her use of imagery and the purpose of the structural choices.

### **Q5. Ted Hughes**

Some confident responses were seen although some candidates misread some aspects of the poem: divorce was discussed in quite a few answers, with a small minority commenting on their "happy marriage". It was pleasing to see a lack of AO3 included in the vast majority of responses, although a few candidates wandered into a comparison of the marriage portrayed in the poem with Hughes and Plath's relationship.

### **Q6. Sylvia Plath**

This was a less popular choice than 'Her Husband', although there were some fairly strong responses to the poem which dealt with Plath's use of imagery. Again, the poet's personal relationship was mentioned in some answers but most candidates kept their focus firmly on AO1 and AO2.

### **Q7. Philip Larkin**

This was a popular choice where most candidates engaged with Larkin's overall ideas with some level of success. The strongest responses provided a perceptive overview of the poem's central theme with a close discussion of a selection of quotations through the text.

Some candidates, however, omitted the overview and attempted a general analysis of the whole poem which did not prove to be as successful. We would also recommend that candidates refer to the last lines of the poem as they are frequently crucial to the poet's theme.

### **Q8. Carol Ann Duffy**

This was another popular choice and many candidates responded successfully. There were some examples of misreading aspects of the poem with some candidates assuming that Duffy's italicised words were from a play and others describing the family depicted as happy. There were also some candidates who included examples of AO3 and AO5 which detracted from the quality of the AOs assessed.

### **Q9. Seamus Heaney**

Many candidates responded with detail to the question and were generally quite successful. Some weaknesses included a misreading of "the giver" and a misunderstanding of the nature of a muse. There was also, unfortunately, very little reference to Heaney's use of the sonnet form and its significance here.

### **Q10. Owen Sheers**

This proved to be quite a popular choice with some interesting and original observations made on the theme of power. There was, however, some misreading as some candidates believed that the "Hitler" described in the poem was Adolf Hitler. This led to a compounded misreading of his treatment of the "Zambian businesswoman". The most successful responses discussed how power affected men and women differently, and how Hunzvi's power was man-made and unnatural.

## **Section B: Poetry comparison**

### **AO1**

- Stronger responses in this section usually showed clear evidence of planning. It is recommended that candidates spend some time planning their essays as structuring and developing their argument is crucial due to the assessment of all five AOs.
- Rubric infringements were still seen this year, mainly with candidates focusing on fewer than the four poems required.
- Some candidates also used poems named in Section A. This also constitutes a rubric infringement and should be avoided.
- A few essays contained references to up to eight poems which led to a superficial coverage of the texts.
- Some candidates also dealt with poems not in the prescribed sections or lists for Thomas, Lewis, Hughes and Lawrence.
- 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.
- Many excellent explorations of texts were seen but some dominated the essay at the expense of AO3 and AO4. A full analysis of four poems is not necessary.
- 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

- As this AO is worth 20 marks, contextual references need to be focused and relevant to the question asked and the poems used. Interesting contextual links were seen but some, unfortunately, drifted from the focus of 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 is most successful when woven into the essay and not added onto the end of the essay. Although this was seen in fewer responses this year, some candidates would obviously benefit from planning their inclusion of AO3.
- The inaccuracy of some contextual detail is still a matter of concern as some candidates referred to incorrect information such as birthdates, locations and relationships.
- Examiners saw many underdeveloped contextual links. As this AO is worth 20 marks, specific details are recommended.

### AO4

- Some excellent and original connections were seen but many essays were unplanned and links were very sparse.
- Stronger responses included connections throughout and not just after the analysis of two poems. Planning, again, is key to achieving this.
- The strongest answers linked specific quotations/use of techniques/structure and discussed the differing effects on 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.

### AO5

- Pleasingly, far fewer candidates this year omitted this AO.
- Some candidates named critics and provided quotations from their sources. Sadly, unless the candidate makes some use of the view by linking it to the poem/quotation, there are limited opportunities to reach the marks in the higher bands.
- Likewise, examiners saw in some essays 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” the interpretation.
- However, some candidates responded with excellent critical discussions and provided sophisticated and autonomous readings of the poems.

### Thomas and Lewis

Examiners read some interesting and well developed responses on the texts with the strongest candidates linking Lewis' and Thomas' poems with confidence. The strongest response to Q 11 dealt with Lewis' ambivalent relationship with Wales but also the sense of community felt during his war service. Responses to Q12 examined a range of poems but some candidates overemphasised the poets' depression as their contextual points. It is vital that centres teach only the prescribed list of poems as some candidates lost marks referencing poems not on the list.

### **Lawrence and Clarke**

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

### **Hughes and Plath**

Question 16 proved to be popular with many candidates successfully exploring Hughes and Plath's depiction of the power of animals and nature. Others examined personal power which was valid but some candidates overemphasised the relationship between the poets as their contextual links. A similar issue was seen in some answers to Q15 with much of AO3 being focused on Plath's depression and suicide attempts.

### **Larkin and Duffy**

A very wide range of responses to Larkin and Duffy were seen by examiners. Both questions proved to be popular with the most successful answers including some perceptive and well selected contextual detail. However, many responses contained some sweeping statements about Duffy's sexuality and Larkin's romantic and family relationships with some candidates describing Larkin's father's politics regardless of its relevance. There were a few rubric infringements in Q18 where candidates chose 'Brothers' as one of their four poems; this had a detrimental effect on AO1 and AO4.

### **Heaney and Sheers**

A popular choice with some strong responses to both questions, examiners saw a range of responses using quite a wide choice of poems. Unfortunately, some candidates struggled with the statement in question 19 and, instead of focusing on the poets' political views on society, merely commented on the behaviour of individuals within society. AO3 in responses to both questions tended to be dominated by Heaney, at the expense of Sheers, with multiple references to the Troubles.

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GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE (New)

Summer 2017

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

**Section A**

Donne was the most popular text, closely followed by Chaucer, Keats and Rossetti. Milton was more of a minority choice. The mean marks for all questions, both part (i) and part (ii), were very close suggesting candidates found all the questions accessible. Candidates performed particularly well on Rossetti.

**Part (i)**

The task of looking closely (AO2) at an individual poem or extract appears to have allowed the majority of candidates to truly engage with poetry in detail and there were many sensitive, exploratory responses to the presentation of, for example, Damyan's character in *The Merchant's Tale*, of Satan's effects as serpent on Eve in *Paradise Lost* and of Keats's reactions to the sea – religious, almost mystical, some felt.

Reference to 'poetic techniques' in questions 2 and 5 seemed to leave some candidates unsure as to what they should focus on, even though the phrase is prominently referred to in the assessment grids for AO2 in the specification and AO2 is always the main focus of all part (i) questions. Although they were not penalised in any way, a minority of candidates strayed unnecessarily at times into discussion of contexts (AO3).

Some candidates showed a lack of confidence when commenting on form, rhythm and rhyme even when they were clearly aware of their effects. The main weakness here was often the lack of adequate supporting evidence.

**Part (ii)**

Most candidates showed they were aware of the importance given to contexts (AO3) in these questions. The questions need to be read carefully, with careful attention paid to key words and all candidates should recognise that contextual influences are at their heart. So when the focus is on 'ideas about evil', a character study of Satan will not suffice, and when the focus is on 'courtly romance', it is not enough to simply discuss love or the theme of marriage in *The Merchant's Tale*. Though most candidates attempted to integrate contextual influences, some still offered stand-alone biographical/historical information. There is also the danger that too much biography or historical background can weaken attention to the texts themselves, something which happened quite often when candidates began their responses with biographical opening paragraphs. The most effective responses referred to clearly defined contextual influences to illuminate their readings of the text in relation to the question, an advanced skill which many performed astonishingly well.

Although questions in parts (i) and (ii) are connected (perhaps by theme, for example), it is likely to be more helpful to candidates if they do not make the poem or extract in part (i) a major part of their response to part (ii). The second, longer question in Section A offers candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the wider text.

There was a tendency to draw too much attention (and sometimes too often) to the poet's personal experience, for example, Rossetti's and Keats's family tragedies and personal relationships, and to give much less weight to literary influences or to influential ideas of the time, for example Victorian and religious attitudes to nature in Rossetti or ideas relating to Romanticism or the Classics in Keats.

## **Section A**

### **Part (i)**

Most candidates answered the short question successfully, showing clear focus on AO2.

1 (i) The majority of candidates recognised the importance of tone and frequently linked their discussion to the Merchant's voice and to his views on love and marriage and drew attention to Damyan's relationship to courtly romance. There was some detailed close reading of the text, for example, of the effects of key words such as 'woful', 'fresshe' and the alliterative phrases 'langwissheth for love' and 'dieth for desir'. All in all, candidates wrote confidently about Chaucer's language in this extract.

2 (i) The majority dealt well with this complex poem, 'Love's Alchemy', and focussed on the central conceits of alchemy and mining, the language of arguments, use of questions and effects of rhyme and tone. Most candidates were able to draw attention to Donne's techniques even when they seemed not to have studied this poem in detail although some struggled with the complexity of the poem's arguments.

3 (i) This extract elicited strong, engaged responses with candidates clearly impressed by Milton's creation of such a seductive passage in this part of the narrative. Most candidates wrote with confidence about Milton's distinctive syntax, his sensuous language and use of epic similes.

4 (i) Many candidates seemed strongly affected by this poem, 'On the Sea', and wrote wonderfully well about how skilfully Keats was able to contain both the power and peaceful beauty of the sea within the sonnet form.

5 (i) Most candidates picked out the contrasting language of life and death in the poem, building on the juxtaposition in the poem's title, and confidently discussed the poem's use of natural and religious language and imagery. However, they tended to be less comfortable discussing the controlling pattern and effective rhymes of the poem. A pity when form is such a feature of Rossetti's writing.

### **Part (ii)**

1 (ii) Many candidates wrote knowledgeably about the conventions of courtly romance and how they were presented by Chaucer in the Tale. But there was also evidence of reliance on prepared answers, some candidates focusing on the Merchant's attitude to marriage and love with the result that courtly romance was only addressed intermittently.

2 (ii) Many candidates wrote well about Donne's wide knowledge of, for instance, geography, cosmology, anatomy, alchemy and religion and how he used these areas (contextual influences) to write about different states of love. Sometimes the desire to write about all of a poem instead of concentrating on relevant parts weakened the answer's focus. And there were a number of candidates who seemed determined to write about poems they had studied even when much of their discussion lacked a clear focus on the key words of the question.

3 (ii) Many strong responses linked ideas about evil to Milton's own political and religious views and to the political and religious culture of his time. Weaker responses offered what often amounted to little more than a character study of Satan. Or candidates discussed Satan's 'traits of evil' or the ways in which Milton 'presents evil through Satan'. Approaches

which tended to miss the central contextual focus of 'ideas about evil' and which could lead to more narrative/descriptive responses. Candidates should always be aware that part (ii) questions deliberately put the focus on context so that context can inform and lead the discussion of the text.

4 (ii) There were many fine discussions of how Keats's response to the nightingale or to autumn or to landscape influenced his presentation of death and decay. Although most candidates concentrated on the Odes, (they made use particularly well of 'To Autumn' ) there were also some relevant discussions of 'Hyperion', 'Lamia', 'La Belle Dame sans Merci' and 'Isabella'. There were many confident mentions of the contextual influence of Romanticism and the Classics, and of Keats's reading and relationship with the natural world. However, there was probably too much reliance on the death and suffering in Keats's own experience.

5 (ii) Candidates wrote confidently on the ways in which Rossetti's references to nature, especially flora, came easily to her when writing about grief in connection with death, love and religion. Many responses were aware of how Rossetti's religious beliefs and reading, especially her Tractarianism, affected her view of the natural world. Weaker responses tended to discuss either nature or grief and could sometimes struggle to connect the two. Candidates referred to an impressive range of poems ('Song', 'A Better Resurrection', 'Hope in Grief', 'On the Death of a Cat', 'Shut Out', 'Heart's Chill Between' were among the most popular).

## **Section B**

Most candidates found the poems accessible, and many found them moving; as one wrote, 'these poems have made me think more carefully about the natural world and, in particular, about our relationship with birds.' All pairings were attempted, pretty equally; if one pairing was most popular it was probably that of poem A and poem D, 'The Skylark' and 'Parrot', where candidates seemed to find the strongest contrasts, a useful basis for making connections (AO4). It was delightful to see how confidently candidates approached this section; surely a tribute to excellent attitudes and approaches developed by teachers in the classroom.

Most candidates focused their discussion of 'The Skylark' on 'happy wings' and 'sings' (often commenting on the importance of rhyme) and suggested freedom was the central theme of the poem while writing passionately about the effects on the less free boys in the poem. Selecting key words seemed to be the most beneficial approach to the poems and to making connections. Candidates who wanted to work their way through the poem could stumble when they met passages which were less clear to them. So giving too much attention at the start of the poem to 'harrows', for example, in 'The Skylark', when candidates were unsure about its significance could lead to misunderstandings later on in the poem. Candidates who took a more selective approach and focused clearly on 'the presentation of birds' tended to be more successful.

Mis-readings were not penalised (after all, these are unseen texts) and could sometimes be partly convincing. More speculative readings were considered sympathetically especially if they were supported with textual evidence. Sometimes candidates extrapolated from the presentation of the birds to wider issues, such as the effects of war on nature (Rosenberg), or the effects of capitalism (Smith), ideas to which examiners responded positively as long as they didn't stray too far from the text.

Insufficient textual evidence for readings and connections was the main weakness in many responses. Candidates were often least convincing when discussing form and structure. For

example, they thought about the effects of the absence of punctuation in Clare's poem, commented on how it might contribute to a stream of consciousness effect, or to the narrative flow or to the themes of freedom and flight but often left the discussion at the level of assertion, so restricting themselves to Band 3 at best.

Examiners noted that responses to section B, to the 'unseen', were often stronger than responses to section A part (ii). Indeed, the level of response in section A was frequently no guide to the level of response in section B. This section seemed to give many candidates the chance to show what they could do unencumbered by the strictures of a set text. And many took that opportunity to write with confidence and flair about poetry. It may be that some students did less well in section A because they were trying to remember what they had learned during the year and in some cases they tried to fit what they had written about in the past to the question now facing them in the exam.

The most successful responses were shaped around connections based on attitudes, language and imagery, form and structure and tone. Discussing the poems separately for much of the answer and then making connections could result in more limited attention to the central and most rewarded AO. What this section showed is that the task of making connections (comparisons) seemed to elicit some of the finest writing and engagement with literature and often brought out wonderfully sensitive and perceptive responses to poetry of a quality not always seen in section A and which delighted examiners time and again.

## WJEC

### GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE (New)

Summer 2017

#### UNIT 4: SHAKESPEARE

##### General Comments

This closed-book unit is devoted wholly to the assessment of Shakespeare study. Section A presents candidates with a compulsory extract-based question, which should take no longer than the recommended 45 minutes, with Section B therefore presenting plenty of time for proper planning of the essay, which features a choice of two questions.

It was encouraging to see candidates planning their responses first, usually producing a more focused and shaped response. However, examiners saw plenty of seriously long responses, which lost their coherence on occasion, and in particular seemed to forget the question. Candidates who signalled early on in the essay question that they were focused on the question were generally more successful than those who started their response more tentatively. There are lots of positives to take from our experience this first summer. We saw:

- an impressive amount of detailed support from and references to the play
- an equally impressive verbatim recall of critical views, usually put to good purpose
- considered approaches to integrating context (AO3) and other interpretations (AO5) which enhanced the central arguments in responses
- evidence that closed book assessment seems to have worked very well; even in Section A, where they have to analyse closely an extract which may appear unfamiliar to them, it was often impossible to tell that candidates didn't have the texts with them.

*Hamlet* and *King Lear* were by far the most popular texts, but we saw an encouraging number of *The Tempest* responses, done very well indeed, with *Antony and Cleopatra* also modestly popular, and *Henry IV Part 1* very much a minority choice.

##### Section A

###### Extract

Whether or not they were familiar with the extract, it was refreshing to see many candidates engaging thoughtfully with the text. We saw many good responses where perceptive analysis and evaluation were offered for AO2 rather than just a list of literary devices. Given the demands of the task in the extract question, where candidates are confronted by a section of text without the actual text for reference, and as AO2 is worth twice the marks of AO1, it is important candidates ask themselves 'what is the meaning here and how is it shaped?' As the extract from their set play is relatively short, there is no need to enter into excessively long discussion of every line of the extract. Too many trawl through the lines, mining for rich pickings in terms of terminology, while missing the central meaning of the speech or speeches in respect of the question. In a minority of cases there was a futile attempt to address AO3 and sometimes AO5. Where candidates embarked on lengthy discussions of the play both prior to and subsequent to this extract, they penalised themselves, as it is only their analysis of the set extract that can be rewarded. 'At this point in the play' is intended to encourage candidates to focus on this specific point. Very brief contextualising is permissible only insofar as it is relevant to the question.

### **1. *King Lear***

The extract from Act 2 scene iv seemed to present good opportunities for candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of the presentation of Lear and how the character is defined by his relationship with his daughters. Some embarked on a line by line discussion of Lear's thoughts and feelings, which sometimes resulted in some incoherence, while those who attempted an overview of the extract first were generally more successful. Most grasped the situation at this point of the play and many noted and discussed the significance of the stage direction indicating the 'storm and tempest'. There was some clear engagement with a range of Lear's feelings, but there were some candidates who struggled with Lear's thoughts regarding 'Man's life is cheap as beast's.' Many ignored the crucial line that precedes it and decided that this was a moment of anagnorisis for Lear, instead of seeing that he argues the need for something 'more than nature needs' in terms of the retinue of knights which Goneril and Regan have reduced to nothing. Some saw the foreshadowing of the 'basest beggars' and the presentation of incipient madness. Not many responses engaged with the idea of 'gorgeous' and its role in Lear's argument. Similarly there were candidates who were unsure of the identity of the 'unnatural hags' but most engaged with the idea of Lear's sense of emasculation.

### **2. *Antony and Cleopatra***

This extract taken from Act 3 Scene xi in the aftermath of the battle of Actium provided most candidates with the opportunity to show their knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Antony and Cleopatra as revealed here. Many noted the shift from Antony's tone of admonishment to one of customary reconciliation at the end of the extract. There was some clear engagement with his sense of dishonour and the implied conflict between his allegiances to both Rome and Egypt. His acknowledgement of Cleopatra's supremacy was discussed, with many also seeing a humility in Cleopatra's brief exchanges, some suggesting it is specious. Most engaged with the notion of constant love between the two, with some of the stronger responses engaging with the nautical imagery and the language of command/authority. The references to Fortune were also picked up in the stronger responses, with some seeing this point in the play as crucial in the development of Antony as tragic hero.

### **3. *Hamlet***

Most candidates found sensible things to say about Hamlet at this point of the play in Act 3, after the play within the play has aroused the King's conscience. There was some sound discussion of Hamlet's role and behaviour as an avenger, his feelings about Claudius and his religious scruples regarding the right time to commit the deed. However, several candidates did not grasp the implicit meaning of 'crimes broad blown, as flush as May', taking this to refer to Claudius rather than Hamlet's father. Others thought that Hamlet should have known that Claudius was 'not really praying' and so missed the nuances of the speech and the dramatic irony, while others curiously thought that Hamlet's reference to his mother indicates a decision to kill her. It was pleasing in general to see close engagement with the language of the extract and also with the structure of Hamlet's speech. The dramatic potential of this scene, with its significance at this point of the play, was noted by many candidates.

### **4. *Henry IV Part 1***

Too few responses to this text were seen for adequate comment.

## 5. *The Tempest*

Most candidates grasped that Prospero abjures his magic at this point of the play in Act 5, and seized the opportunity to talk about the rich imagery of magic, the supernatural and mythology. Fewer noted the implications of his command to Ariel, such as one candidate commented perceptively: 'Prospero decides on exacting forgiveness instead of retribution against his adversaries', although there was some sound analysis of how this presents an imperative, decisive side to Prospero's. Some saw the nuances of Prospero's magical abilities, suggesting that the list of accomplishments includes the benign as well as the destructive. Prospero's egotism was a popular theme, but there was also recognition of his wise acknowledgement that this is 'rough magic' and 'so potent art'. There was some confusion regarding 'demi-puppets', many thinking this referred to the people he had tricked rather than fairies or elves, but there was an encouraging number of candidates who saw the symbolic significance as well as the cadence of 'break my staff' and 'drown my book'.

## Section B

### Essay

In the essay task, **AO3 is double weighted at 30 marks**, yet a worrying number of candidates either chose to ignore this assessment objective or were unaware that they had to address context. Examiners reported whole centres where this was the case, causing a significant loss of marks on this section of the paper. We also saw instances where **AO5** had not been addressed at all, with a further loss of up to 15 marks. It is vital that all candidates are aware of what is expected of them prior to entering the examination room.

Approaches to AO3 ranged from the token gesture 'acknowledging' contexts, to a full-on engagement with any form of context, tacked on and sewn in without any care to its application or relevance. Sometimes this was at the expense of discussing the actual play. Far too many responses featured sweeping generalisations along the lines of 'Jacobean society hated all women' or dubiously significant tales of kings and queens, and in particular that all Elizabethan/Jacobean audiences 'would be shocked' at some of the portrayed behaviour of the protagonists. The most successful responses integrate discussion about contextual significance into their argument, not merely presenting it as a stand-alone comment of questionable relevance.

AO5 approaches are proving to be quite divergent, from those who just say (repeatedly) 'arguably' to those who spend the whole essay debating the central issues, along with quoting esteemed critics with or without understanding what these critics have to say. Again, it is those who integrate alternative interpretations into their arguments who do best.

### *King Lear*

Both questions attracted a considerable number of candidates. While most engaged with the concept of a 'heartless universe' in Question 6, fewer were able to deal with the idea of the 'absurdity of life' and even fewer with the view that this was Shakespeare's 'chief concern'. Consequently there were instances where responses only addressed half the question, and this is a matter of concern. Although candidates may choose to discuss one aspect of the expressed view predominantly, they must engage to some extent with the other concepts embedded in the question in order to do justice to the task. Many candidates agreed with the view in Question 7, but only the more discerning of those who proposed Edmund as an example of the violence-power combination saw that his violence is vicarious. Goneril and Regan were discussed by most as the most obvious exponents of power and violence, with some focus on Cornwall, while there were some interesting suggestions about the violence and power of nature, as well as Lear's verbal violence in the relinquishing of power.

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

The more popular question seemed to be Question 9, with candidates mainly agreeing with the stated view, interrogating the mutually destructive relationship of the central protagonists. However, many took the opportunity to discuss fully the impact of war on Antony and Cleopatra's relationship and also other characters, with some considered discussion of Enobarbus. The conflict between Roman and Egyptian values was also seen as destructive, while some responses argued cogently for Antony's actions and behaviour as being the prime force of destruction. Question 8 enabled candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of tragedy as a genre, with some arguing that both lovers are tragic for much of the play, their hubris evident from the start in terms of their reckless love for each other. Others gave full consideration to the argument that Cleopatra only becomes truly tragic after Antony's death, although there were some concerns that Cleopatra does not have the same opportunities as Antony for anagnorisis.

### ***Hamlet***

Question 10 was more popular on the whole, with many seizing the opportunity to write about the play as a revenge tragedy, but not as many comfortable with the concept of 'domestic' drama, or indeed able to engage with 'domestic' in any aspect of the play. Consequently there were responses which had only addressed half of the question, resulting in candidates penalising themselves in the process. As observed in the ***King Lear*** comments above, although candidates may choose to discuss one aspect of the question predominantly, they must engage to some extent with the other concepts embedded in the question in order to do justice to the task. Those who engaged fully with the given view addressed the idea of domestic as 'family', with plenty of discussion of Hamlet's relationship with his mother and also his father, others also considering the Polonius- Ophelia- Laertes aspect of 'domestic drama' and the respective tragic outcomes. Those candidates who approached the question more tentatively via the 'revenge tragedy' route managed in the main to address the idea of Hamlet as avenger in comparison with Laertes, both bent on revenge for family members and so were able to arrive at some understanding of 'domestic'. Question 11 responses showed a variety of approaches, with most engaging with the concept of Hamlet's melancholy and 'sickness of soul' but fewer with the concept of 'disordered'. While several saw the nuances of Hamlet's role and responsibilities as prince and avenger, others focused only on his melancholy as the main driver for the dramatic action.

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

Too few responses to this text were seen for adequate comment.

### ***The Tempest***

Question 15 was more popular, with many candidates tackling the presentation of Ariel and Caliban mainly via the presentation of their relationships with Prospero and the themes of service and colonisation. Caliban's behaviour and attitudes proved to be a rich source of evidence for discussion of 'unclear moral values', with Prospero's relationship with Miranda also seen as morally suspect in terms of her cultivated innocence. Some responses made reference to the minor elements of comedy, some involving Caliban, which they saw as lightening the moral ambiguity of the play. Question 14 was generally done well, with the majority of candidates engaging in discussion of the entertainment value of the setting, magic and the supernatural elements set against the arguably serious messages of the play. One particularly eloquent candidate saw the significance of the 'entertaining spectacle' as 'Prospero the 'surrogate playwright who has aspired for his art...to enchant the audience, becoming an allegory for artistic creation'.

## Summary

Some issues to inform us all going forward:

- Candidates should take time to consider what the question is asking, and also try to identify where assessment objectives are targeted in the question. In order to facilitate candidates being able to address all relevant AOs, questions have been carefully phrased to allow each candidate access to a focused discussion.
- The set extracts proved to sort candidates out quite sharply into those who had read their play in depth, either in class or at home, and those who had presumably only familiarised themselves with some big speeches.
- It was a matter of general concern that in some centres it was clear to see that candidates were unaware that they had to address AO3 in the essay and that this AO was double weighted for Section B of this Shakespeare paper. We saw too many good candidates lose a substantial amount of marks because they had not responded adequately to this AO. Similarly, some candidates did not seem aware that they had to address AO5, and there were several instances where examiners struggled to award marks for this AO.
- Candidates and teachers need to remember that above all examiners look to reward engagement with the texts and all discussion of contexts and other interpretations should be properly integrated into the response, not merely acknowledged or invented, as appeared to be the case sometimes. There is evidence of some groups of candidates adopting a 'one size fits all' approach to context and critics, with the same material offloaded regardless of the question. It is only the most astute of candidates who can turn this around to their own advantage.
- Please note that more feedback will be available in the autumn series of CPD and we very much hope teachers will be able to attend.

Finally, the team of examiners for this component wish to congratulate all candidates and their teachers for a most encouraging start to the new specification. This is a demanding component which tests knowledge and understanding of three plays, without the texts for reference, and with double weighting of AO3 and AO4.

We have been privileged to read so many interesting and genuinely academic responses to these texts.

**WJEC**  
**GCE ENGLISH LITERATURE (New)**  
**Summer 2017**  
**UNIT 5: PROSE STUDY**

### **General Comments**

The majority of centres adapted successfully to the demands of the new Prose Study unit and moderators were fortunate enough to read some outstanding responses to a range of inventive and stimulating text combinations. Many candidates seem to have welcomed the opportunity to study texts written during their life time and responded enthusiastically to a wide variety of 21<sup>st</sup> century texts.

The candidates' work was accurately assessed by their teachers on the whole, but adjustments were made to a significant number of centres' marks. While some adjustments were to be expected given a new specification and a wider mark range of 120, there was a tendency to mark candidates work too generously in many centres, suggesting that advice on assessment and standardising had not been fully taken on board. It was, however, encouraging that most centres recognised the need to focus closely on the criteria in first awarding a band for each AO and then fine-tuning the actual mark, as teachers had become accustomed to doing in the legacy NEA units.

In addition to advice regarding the application of the assessment criteria, moderators identified the importance of the following issues in affecting candidates' chances of success in this unit:

- careful text selection and pairing
- teaching approaches
- task-setting – not just the choice of topic but the actual wording of the title
- internal assessment procedures.

### **Text Selection**

- While most centres ensured that all texts had been approved by WJEC, a small number had not followed procedure and **allowed candidates to respond to post-2000 works which did not have sufficient literary merit**. This often led to a rather superficial approach and/or a tendency to favour the pre-2000 text.
- **Quite a few post-2000 texts seemed to have been chosen for accessibility rather than literary merit** and did not support close, detailed analysis of language and prose technique. Candidates tended to focus solely on plot and to write about characters as if real people which affected marks for AO2. Some texts which might be worth reconsidering include: *The Outcast*; *The Secret Life of Bees*; *The Welsh Girl*; *The Help*; *The Thirteenth Tale*. While there were instances of confident, well-prepared candidates who responded to texts like these with insight, perception and sophisticated, original thinking, these were rare. More often centres chose such texts

- for less confident candidates in the hope that their relative accessibility would be helpful. Unfortunately, in most cases, the opposite was true and weaker candidates struggled to engage with 'slighter' texts as literary works rather than simply as stories.
- **Some text combinations were unhelpful because the texts were so similar** in subject-matter and theme. For example, candidates tackling *The Color Purple* along with *The Help*, Valerie Martin's *Property* or *The Long Song* by Andrea Levy, tended to view the works solely as very broad illustrations of racial prejudice, often making sweeping generalisations about contextual influences and largely overlooking the novels' nuances and subtleties as literary works. The reworking of established texts rarely worked well and candidates attempting to compare Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* found it difficult not to conflate characters and themes, while comparing *The Road* with *On the Road* led to some confusion for candidates.
- On the other hand, **some combinations were less successful because the texts were so different** as to make it difficult to find any common ground for meaningful comparison and contrast. While we would not wish to limit candidates' freedom of choice and independence, it must be acknowledged that some pairings were always going to prove very difficult; the candidates who compared *A Room with a View* with *Damned United* or *We Need to Talk About Kevin* faced an uphill battle.
- **Dystopian texts were popular**, especially linking *The Road* with *1984*, *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Brave New World*, although there was a danger of a rather reductive approach, with the essay descending into a list of typical generic features. This was also true, as in the past, when candidates chose texts in order to compare treatment of **gothic tropes** in texts such as Sarah Waters' *The Little Stranger* or McCabe's *The Dead School* paired with *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights* or *Dracula*. A narrow focus on generic features can blinker candidates so that the texts are viewed only as examples of common features rather than individual, sophisticated literary works in their own right.
- Some centres opted to focus on **literary non-fiction** which was an interesting choice but it became clear that candidates need support when tackling a different, less familiar genre; candidates comparing *The Road to Wigan Pier* with Ben Judah's *This is London* needed some grounding in reportage so as to avoid approaching the texts as if they were novels.

### Teaching Approaches

Although there is **no hierarchy when it comes to teaching approaches**, and centres are free to decide which is best for their students, there are certain considerations to bear in mind. There should be scope to demonstrate some independence and originality, especially for candidates aiming at higher bands. However, centres must give **careful thought to the degree of independence appropriate** and to bear in mind that candidates will need support in their studies, whichever approach is taken. It is worth remembering that candidates will only have studied one prose text in Year 12 and might struggle if left to prepare their Prose Study texts without structured guidance.

- Centres can decide that it would be most helpful and appropriate for their students to **study the same two texts**, but it is not advisable that they respond to the same topic, let alone the same question. Fortunately, there were relatively few instances of the latter, but when they did occur, not only was it difficult for candidates to demonstrate any individuality but also for the teachers to rank and assess

- candidates' work accurately. Perhaps this is hardly surprising when the candidates had included so much of the same material, focusing on the same extracts, using the same quoted evidence and the same critical views.
- Some centres offered their candidates **a very wide choice of texts in both categories**, which may be in the spirit of the unit, but moderators felt that some candidates found it difficult to work so independently and tended to rush to the internet for support. As with LT3, the centres who successfully offered candidates a free choice of text had developed a **carefully planned support scheme of work** whereby independent study was underpinned with structured lessons on generic skills and topics related to prose technique, as well as guidance on research and essay writing. Offering candidates a completely free rein when it comes to text selection is by no means an easy option for teachers.
- **Most centres struck an effective half-way point between these two options** by selecting a common text in one of the categories and giving candidates some choice in their paired text, whether from a long list of titles or just two or three. In the best examples, the texts were selected because they allowed candidates to choose from a wide variety of topics one which genuinely interested them.
- There was a sense gained by many moderators that **candidates simply did not know their texts well enough** and that some had read them only once rather than studying them in detail. Centres should impress upon candidates that these texts have equal weight with their set texts and they should study them thoroughly before writing about them. Rather than reading *about* their chosen works via on-line study sites, candidates would be better served by rereading the actual texts. Moderators felt that it would benefit candidates to have **more guidance on how to study a novel and how to make best use of on-line research materials**.

### Task setting

As had become increasingly obvious in the Legacy specification with regard to NEA units, **task setting is of crucial importance and is much too important to leave solely to the candidates**. While it is hoped they will choose their *own topics*, they should not be trusted with the final wording of their *own titles*. In the most successful centres, the dialogue between teacher and candidate in fine-tuning the wording of tasks was an invaluable part of the process, helping the candidate to decide exactly what to write about and how to structure the argument.

While many candidates' titles were helpfully worded, moderators were disappointed to see there were **still far too many examples of candidates clearly hampered by poorly worded tasks** which led them away from literary appreciation of the texts.

The **main problems** with the wording of tasks, echoing similar concerns raised repeatedly in Principal Moderators' reports for both LT2 and LT3, were:

- **Overly complicated titles** which suggested a superficial sophistication but which actually made it difficult for the candidate to craft a sophisticated response. At times, moderators had to confess that they couldn't actually understand what the title meant, which didn't bode well for the candidate's success in responding to it.
- **Not ensuring that a literary focus was emphasised**, leading candidates to foreground context or simply abstract ideas or concepts rather than critical appreciation. It would be worthwhile teachers emphasising the difference between the terms '*represent*' and '*present*' in a literary essay. The most successful tasks

- were worded so as to put the spotlight on the writers' shaping and presentation of themes, rather than solely on the ideas raised in the texts. Candidates are best advised to include the word '**presentation**' in their titles, to understand exactly what it means and why it's so important to a student of literature.
- **Lots of candidates tackled tasks on identity** which were not always successful. While some confident candidates relished the opportunity to take a sophisticated conceptual approach to the texts, clearly comfortable with the notion of fictional identity and its shaping by the writer, tasks centring on 'identity' tended to encourage psychoanalysis of the characters as if they were real people or sweeping sociological or philosophical generalisations. They rarely had the desired effect of leading candidates into closer literary appreciation of the texts and are perhaps best treated with caution.
- **An emphasis on 'society' and 'social class' was still popular**, even though this has been repeatedly raised as a tricky approach in the Legacy NEA units. In the majority of cases, this led candidates to take a contextual lead in responding to the texts, viewing them as illustrations of the social hierarchy at the time of writing rather than as crafted literary works. They tended to make sweeping generalisations about class divisions, lacking knowledge at 17 or 18 of the subtle nuances in play, and therefore gaining a less than sophisticated grasp of the writer's artistry:  
*'Lucy Honeychurch and George Emerson would never have met if they hadn't ended up sharing a room with a view in the same pension in Italy as she's upper class and he's working class.'*  
*'The Earnshaw, like the Lintons, are upper class and look down on Heathcliff's lower class origins'*
- **Some tasks were too wide-ranging** making it difficult for candidates to explore presentation in any depth as they spread their attention too widely. Titles often invited candidates rather vaguely to 'write about' or 'describe', and even 'explore' could be too open-ended without a precisely defined focus. In most cases, using a carefully worded critical opinion or even a single qualifying adjective would have narrowed the focus and helped the candidate organise the material into a clear argument rather than a series of examples or observations loosely related to the theme.

**In preparation for next year's Prose Study, it might be a useful exercise for teachers and candidates to consider the potential pitfalls of some of these tasks and how they could be more helpfully worded:**

- How social class differs from identity in *Wuthering Heights* and *Atonement*.
- Discuss the ways in which the writers use the themes of justice to conform to moral principles in the texts.
- The characters in *Jane Eyre* and *The Outcast* are symbolic; they represent the conflicts of society.
- Explore the paradigms of assimilation in *Heart of Darkness* and *The Meat Tree*.
- Moran describes the late Victorian period as 'a battle between the outmoded value of the Victorian past and the rebellious, liberating possibilities of a more modern outlook.' How do Hardy and McEwan present the changing attitudes towards social class in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Atonement*.
- Consider the theme of identity under pressure in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *Half a Yellow Sun*.

- How far do you agree that 'tradition creates relationships' and how does the statement apply to *Birdsong* and *The Welsh Girl*?
- To what extent can we argue that Orwell in *1984* and McCarthy in *The Road* are writing dystopian novels that have any relevance to us?
- Compare and contrast how both Faulks and Rhys present male characters in *Birdsong* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* and explore how the societies at the time affect the characters' attitudes and values.
- Analyse how the context of the societies in which the novels are set affects the characters in *Dracula* and *Fingersmith*.
- Consider the idea that 'Inwardness is a female disease' in *The Color Purple* and *Brooklyn*.

**After their first experience of the new specification, most centres will hopefully see the benefit of reflecting upon, and reviewing, their preparation for this component, giving careful consideration to the best teaching approaches and text combinations for their candidates. Teachers delivering the course will have a clearer overview of the A Level course as a whole and how best to divide time between the different components.**

### **Balancing AOs**

As with the Legacy NEA units, balancing the AOs proved to be no easy task but the most successful centres were those where candidates and teachers had a clear understanding of the assessment criteria.

#### **AO1**

- This covers much more than accurate writing and, put simply, rewards the **candidate's understanding and knowledge** of the texts. *Sophisticated, confident* writing is always grounded in thorough knowledge and understanding which allows for *creative engagement*, while *flair* is often characterised by concise expression of ideas using precise, carefully chosen vocabulary.
- **Organisation** is a key part of this AO, the ability to select and structure material into a relevant argument. When ordering their ideas and signposting their direction clearly to the reader, most candidates would be well-advised to give more thought to the value of careful **paragraphing**, which seems increasingly to be a dying art.
- Some centres had clearly encouraged the **crafting of effective introductions** in outlining the candidates' arguments, often helping them make a good start. However, there was a distinct vogue for opening the essay with dictionary definition of terms, such as 'conflict', 'prejudice' or the all-too-common 'identity'. The candidates clearly hoped this was a sophisticated and scholarly approach to the opening sentence but in many cases it exacerbated the focus on the idea per se rather than on the texts.
- Of course, **accurate, coherent expression is important** and some centres do not acknowledge frequent and serious lapses when awarding a mark for AO1.

## AO2

- Even though this is not more heavily weighted as it was in LT3, it should still be the **foundation stone** of a successful literary response.
- **Commentary of meaning** was often rewarded in the name of *analysis*, a term quite frequently used in primary markers' annotation when candidates were demonstrating understanding of implied meaning. This is also rewarded under AO2 but *analysis of technique* involves **explicit engagement with, and discussion of, the writer's craft, how** his or her conscious choice of language or prose technique has conveyed meaning.
- **Knowing the text well enough** to be able to select apt support was a key discriminator.
- The best candidates **developed key ideas** by 'digging into' carefully selected quotations and then finding more evidence to avoid assertion. Some candidates **over-analysed quoted words**, sometimes taken out of context, to the point that they were in danger of misrepresenting the writer's intention completely and instead imposing their own views on the text.
- Some candidates seemed **unfamiliar with the conventions of novel writing and prose technique**, and clearly needed to revisit this to support their independent study.
- One example would be **too much emphasis on sound effects**, suggesting a less than secure grasp of genre. Elaborate claims were made for two words starting with the same consonant, as in, for example: *'Mr Brocklehurst has a 'stony silence', the sibilance suggesting he has a cold and frightening effect on young Jane'*. This candidate would have shown more secure generic awareness by concentrating on *the image* which conveys the meaning here.
- **Lots of impressive-sounding linguistic terms** were used, not always to good effect. This can lend a surface sophistication but candidates would do better to familiarise themselves with **literary terminology** (Please see the useful toolkit on the open website). It's not always helpful to label all word classes or identify the 'non-diegetic narrator' unless there is a point to be made about why the writer made that choice. Moderators still read a lot about 'semantic fields', syndetic lists and 'connoting' but candidates did not always go on to consider *how* these conveyed meaning:
  - *The abstract noun 'funeral' creates a semantic field of death*
  - *The pronoun and noun 'he' and 'uncle' provide a semantic field of authority.*
  - *'Misery' connotes unhappiness*
  - *Bronte uses a syndetic list for Jane's feelings...*
- Candidates were over-rewarded **for writing about characters as if they were real people** and for superficial speculation about their motives and feelings without sufficient support. It was noticeable that there was relatively sparse reference to *the writers* in such responses.

## AO3

- As mentioned under task setting, and countless times in feedback to centres, far too many candidates let **context rather than literary appreciation drive their responses**. While there were thankfully fewer opportunities to write about the horrors of war than in the Legacy specification, some candidates wrote a great deal about

- the political and social background to the texts, often starting with this and then moving onto the texts. At times some seemed to have forgotten that they were studying English literature.
- When rewarding AO3, Band 5 marks must be reserved, not for candidates who have done a lot of research which they then unload in their essays, but for those who **fully understand the relationship between text and context** and how a range of possible influences may affect the writing and reception. These candidates discuss, rather than assert, the significance of contextual factors and keep the text to the fore. They do not forget what they're studying.
- **Biographical context is increasingly popular** and was, in fact, the only contextual factor some candidates considered. The fact that Cormac McCarthy had a son relatively late in life figured very large in consideration of *The Road* as did Jean Rhys' stay in prison as a factor in her choosing Bertha Mason as a central character. The wisest candidates remembered that such connections are speculative and used tentative language to consider them as a possible interpretation, addressing both AOs 3 and 5. **Those who suggested that novelists only write to describe their own experiences did not demonstrate a strong understanding of the creative process or the conventions of literary fiction.** The dangers of relying too heavily on biographical context was made clear in the candidate writing about *Cloud Atlas* who suggested that author David Mitchell's main occupation as a tv comedian clearly influenced the comic tone of his novel!

#### AO4

- It was very encouraging to note that most **struck an appropriate balance** between their two texts and handled this AO quite effectively.
- However, there was a **tendency to over-reward connections based on the number and frequency rather than the quality of links**, suggesting the difference between criteria for Bands 4 and 5 is still causing some uncertainty.
  - **Band 4**, connections are **sound and purposeful**, in that they're relevant to the argument and well-supported with textual reference and detail, showing **secure** understanding and knowledge.
  - **Band 5** is a step-up in that the connections become **productive**, if actually furthering the argument, and **illuminating** when the candidate demonstrates a clearer, enhanced understanding by comparing and contrasting the texts.
- There was occasional evidence of primary markers **rewarding connections between characters or events in the same text** as AO4 when links must be between the two texts.
- The best connections were **literary rather than contextual**.
- Most candidates wrote about the texts in an **integrated way** from the start, although some chose to consider them separately and make some connections at the end which was less successful as links tended to be rather superficial or assertive.

#### AO5

- This AO should reward **literary interpretations of texts** rather than sociological, philosophical or economic theories which might be applied to the texts but often relate more closely to context than alternative readings. The best examples occurred when candidates discussed what **literary critics** have written about texts, demonstrating how this had helped to shape their own responses.
- There was inevitably **less critical material to use with post-2000 texts** but some candidates made clever use of criticisms of the more established pre-2000 text: what a critic said about Ishiguro's presentation of Stevens as an unreliable narrator could also be considered in relation to Barnes' Tony Webster in *A Sense of an Ending*, for instance.

- Many candidates used **newspaper reviews** in discussing post-2000 novels which was a valid approach, but it's important that the quality of the review is considered. Use of cover blurbs or readers' comments from on-line book clubs was rarely helpful.
- Too many candidates relied very heavily **on on-line study sites** and in the worst cases this led to malpractice as material was clearly plagiarised; rather than demonstrating their understanding of what they'd read on sites by expressing it in their own words, candidates sometimes 'lifted' whole sentences, sometimes changing just the order of a few words. This is clearly not acceptable and **it is the centre's responsibility to underline for candidates the very real dangers of such an approach**. The more centres can do to encourage candidates to go back to the text and read the writer's words, rather than relying on those from some stranger on the internet, the better. These sites rely on **superficial commentary** and this is often aped by candidates who clearly don't fully grasp the difference between 'a critic on Sparknotes' and a worthwhile literary critique. Reading **post-graduate essays** online can also be problematic as their emphasis is not always literary. Many such theses have a sociological or historicist leaning which can mean that candidates who depend on them without guidance reproduce the same contextual focus. There is an important difference between responding to *White Teeth* as a literary novel and using it to comment on attitudes to multi-culturalism in society. Candidates do need help with this distinction and **the most successful centres clearly gave advice on research and effective use of other readers' opinions**, a vital skill for examination preparation as well as the NEA response.
- The most careful markers **used the band descriptors very carefully**, distinguishing between the quoting of **clear or sound** use of relevant views for Bands 3 and 4 respectively, and those candidates who merited Band 5 marks because they used critical opinion or alternative readings as a basis for **discussion** in arguing their case. They also made this distinction clear to their candidates.
- **Freudian and Marxist readings** of the text were often problematic and not especially helpful to the candidates as they tended to encourage a psychoanalytical/'real people' approach or an economic/socio-political generalisation respectively. Candidates often needed a clearer understanding of these 'schools of thought' if they were to be really helpful.

### Annotation and Assessment

The main issues were:

- **Not enough detailed annotation** of scripts to justify the marks awarded.
- **AO markers were still used without any clear indication of the band achieved** at that point, as repeatedly mentioned in previous reports in the Legacy specification. The most accurate markers accompanied AO markers with brief descriptors, such as **clear, secure or sophisticated**, making clear to other readers, and in their own mind, how well the candidate was performing at key moments.
- Comments in margins did not always accurately reflect the standard of candidates' work, especially the crucial difference between **clear/appropriate, secure/sound** and **sophisticated/confident**.

- After placing candidates in rank order, some centres **immediately placed the top candidates' responses at the top of Band 5** without comparing them with the examples of Band 5 work in standardising materials made available to centres at CPD and in on-line materials.
- Not paying close enough attention to the **qualifying terms** in the assessment criteria.
- The tendency to **push candidates to the top of the band**, rather than fine-tuning assessment within the band. This obviously led to a serious inflation of the candidate's overall marks.
- **A lack of consistent approaches** to marking and annotation at centres
- **Internal standardisation was not always sufficiently robust to make the rank order secure.** The most accurate centres included evidence of meaningful dialogue between markers rather than a nod towards internal standardisation. Moderators often reported that the secondary 'marker' had simply initialled and 'agreed' the original mark in every case, especially in those centres where assessment was not secure.
- **In nearly all cases where centres' marks had to be adjusted it was because they were too generous.** In many cases, nearly all the candidates' marks were in Bands 4 and 5 rather than reflecting more accurately the range of candidates' achievements. The new marking range of 120 rather than 40 was to some extent a factor, but centres should be used to the 5-band system and the wording of the AOs is almost exactly the same as for the Legacy specification. The fact that there are more marks available in each band for each AO should allow centres to make really thoughtful distinctions between the candidates they teach.

**In order to avoid adjustment to their candidates' marks, it is important that departments review their assessment and standardising procedures. There will be further guidance and support for centres in readiness for next year's submission.**

### **Administration**

- Most centres were familiar with the procedure for submitting their samples of ten candidates and there were **few problems** with the administration.
- **Some centres had not included the checklist** designed to help centres prepare their samples efficiently and to streamline the moderation process. This checklist can be downloaded along with the coversheets from the open website.
- Some samples posted in simple AO3 envelopes were **damaged in transit**, suggesting that plastic sacks would be more secure.
- A small number of centres posted their candidates' work **very late** without alerting the Subject Officer which caused inconvenience and extra work for WJEC staff. The deadline is obviously set to ensure all candidates have the same time to complete their work and if centres realise their sample may be delayed for any reason they should contact the Subject Officer.
- Essays should be tagged or stapled, **not** placed in individual wallets.
- Moderators were very pleased to report that most candidates kept within the **recommended word count** of 2500 to 3500 words. A few were very brief and thus self-limiting but it was encouraging that teachers had clearly impressed upon candidates that writing too much can also be self-penalising.

### Summary of Advice

- ✓ Centres should **review approaches to text-selection and task-setting**, using available advice (see CPD materials on the WJEC secure website).
- ✓ Teachers should consider how much **independence** is appropriate for their candidates and **how best to support their study of prose technique**.
- ✓ Candidates should start reading and preparing for this component **as soon as possible in Year 12** rather than embarking on the Prose Study in Year 13.
- ✓ The emphasis should be placed on **reading and studying the texts in some detail** rather than over-reliance on web-based study sites.
- ✓ Primary markers should consult all available **guidance on standardising** before assessing their own candidates' work.
- ✓ Heads of department/Team Leaders should **review internal moderation procedures** to ensure that the centre's standards are accurate and consistent

Some teething problems were to be expected at the start of a new specification and it's important to remember that the vast majority of candidates managed to write relevant, well-informed responses which were sensitively and accurately assessed by their teachers. There was much to impress and entertain the moderators, most of whom expressed admiration for both candidates and teachers in producing work of such a high standard. Hopefully, along the way, preparing for this component may actually have helped some candidates to develop an interest in reading!



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