

English Language & Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H473

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H073

Report on the Units

June 2010

HX73/R/10

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Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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F671 Speaking Voices [Closed Text]

General Comments

As the specification has become less of an unknown quantity, most Centres and candidates seem to have adapted to the demands of the texts and tasks. There was a wide range of performance in this session, the best of it characterised by careful attention to textual detail and judicious use of combined linguistic and literary approaches.

The majority of candidates again chose to answer on *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (question 2) in Section A, most often paired with question 4 (*The Great Gatsby*) in Section B. Smaller numbers chose *A Room with a View* or *Wide Sargasso Sea* in Section B. The number of candidates doing question 1 or question 3 (*Surfacing* or *Hawksmoor*) in Section A remained comparatively small.

Encouragingly, all texts had stimulated interest and engagement in the students, which is a tribute to teachers and their hard work. Some candidates, however, had clearly struggled to grasp the basics of their chosen texts, and were inclined to base their answers on prepared material; and this generally worked to their disadvantage.

It has frequently been pointed out, in successive Reports and at INSET, that the F671 question paper provides most of the textual material that candidates will need. (Candidates need all the help they can get in a closed-text paper.) Clearly, well-prepared candidates will have a number of quotations and textual references in mind, but these need to be used thoughtfully. An apt reference imperfectly remembered (“Nick says something about his moral sense being like a soldier, standing to attention”) is better than a perfectly-accurate quotation squeezed or stretched to fit a point which it doesn’t really match. And ‘dumping’ generalised (and often barely-digested) material about typical features of spoken language in Section A, or the Jazz Age in Section B, is always unhelpful.

In Section A, the Passage A spoken language transcriptions are deliberately chosen to match and/or complement the Passage B extracts in content, so that candidates do not waste time trying to find similarities and/or contrasts of subject matter and therefore can get on with the much more productive business of analysing *how* meaning is constructed. Similarly, the passages provided for comparison/contrast in Section B are chosen so as to provide a way in to the question: they are an additional source of (contextual) information and support, *not* an extra ‘hurdle’ for candidates to clamber over.

As in previous sessions, most candidates did Section A first, though there is no absolute requirement to do so. Individual candidates often performed better on one question than the other. More often such disparate performance was a matter of time management and examination technique than an indication that they were finding either Section A or Section B more difficult.

The Assessment Objective weightings for the Unit mean that AO2 is dominant in Section A, AO3 in Section B. However, there will always be significant overlap between the AOs, and a competent integrated linguistic/literary approach is likely to include aspects of AO1, AO2 and AO3 in virtually every relevant comment.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

The question-wording invites candidates to *compare the construction and effects of the speaking voices* in a piece (Passage A) of transcribed spoken English and an extract (Passage B) from their chosen novel. The bullet-prompts remind candidates to consider

- features in Passage A which are characteristic of spoken language
- how features of syntax, lexis and register produce distinctive voices in these two passages
- ways in which the writer uses speaking voices in Passage B and elsewhere in the novel

Construction refers to the key constituents of language – in the words of AO2, *the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings*. The first two bullet-prompts direct attention particularly to features characteristic of *spoken language* and features of *syntax, lexis and register*.

Effects refers to the impact of language choice on audience – which may be listener, viewer, interlocutor, reader. The third bullet-prompt directs attention particularly to the (variety of) uses of speaking voices in the novel as a whole, and candidates should find plenty of scope to explore both narrative and dialogue.

Despite being advised otherwise, both in previous Reports and at INSET, some candidates still seemed to feel it necessary to ‘prove’ that Passage A was natural more-or-less-spontaneous speech by simply locating, identifying and listing typical features of spoken language. These were often candidates who also struggled to realise (and remember!) that *voice* in Passage B and elsewhere in the chosen novel is a *fictional construct*, whereas the spontaneous speech in Passage A is someone’s natural utterance. So it is not helpful there to write of the speaker(s) *using* (for example) fillers, repairs or micro-pauses: these might be features of their spoken language, but such features *construct* voice rather than the other way round. Similarly, it is almost always unhelpful to identify ‘errors’ in spoken language as if it were an inferior version of written Standard English.

Since Section A questions are passage-based, it should actually be easier for candidates to maintain a focus on relevant textual detail in this Section than in Section B. A sensible strategy would be to make substantial annotation on the question paper while reading the passages: this would enable candidates more readily to support points with appropriate reference. Many answers, however, made *general* points about the ‘speaking voices’ in the passages and the novel without citing (and therefore without being able to *analyse* and *evaluate*) *specific* features of language.

Question 1: *Surfacing*

The narrator’s first account of her ‘wedding’ was paired with a conversation between two nurses, one of whom describes the reaction of the Matron in charge of the hospital when she told her she was getting married.

Although candidates regularly assert that the ‘voice’ of *Surfacing*’s narrator shows signs of her (alleged) mental instability, they struggled once again to find evidence for such a view in either the dialogue or the narrative here. However, astute readers detected confusion (at least) in the strange mixture of sensory detail: ‘I could recall the exact smells, glue and humid socks and the odour of second-day blouse and crystallized deodorant from the irritated secretary, and, from another doorway, the chill of antiseptic.’

Interestingly, nearly all candidates missed the most blatant hint that what we are being told here is less than the truth: 'He was talking to me as though I was an invalid, not a bride.' But the most frequent (and damaging) error was to assume that the second (male) speaker in the passage was Joe: some candidates clearly did not know the novel well enough.

Basic understanding of Passage A was more secure. Candidates noticed and made useful comments about Vickie's range of 'voices': her own, her mother's and the Matron's. They appreciated that there were two 'rounds' of story-telling going on, Christine's and Vickie's, and that Vickie initially mis-judges her 'turn' to speak. Some sensed that there were interesting features to be analysed in Vickie's long utterance, but lacked the A02 skills needed.

The mark-scheme contains indications of material and issues for further relevant discussion.

Question 2: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Christopher's account of a conversation with his father when he comes home for supper after investigating the death of Wellington the dog was paired with a transcription of a man (Ian) describing the attitudes of his 'tweenager' daughter.

Better answers concentrated on Father's increasing exasperation, Christopher's way of avoiding conversation by dwelling on his food, and at the similarities and differences between Christopher's speaking voice and his narrative voice. There were also useful comparisons between his "white lie" example and the long section of compound strings in Passage A.

This was potentially a fruitful passage for candidates, as it shows Christopher understanding the pragmatic meaning of Father's opening question and choosing to answer it literally instead, as well as understanding the idiom of keeping his nose out of other people's business but being obstinately convinced that this is his business (without knowing how right he will be proved to be). Astute candidates noticed not only Haddon's skill in showing Father's anger to us through Christopher – while he remains oblivious to it – but also the proleptic irony with the later revelation of Father's guilt.

However, although many candidates pointed out that Haddon never mentions Asperger's Syndrome in the novel, they still made assertions about Christopher's Asperger's-influenced voice, regardless of whether these were supported or contradicted by the passage.

Passage A engaged candidates, but surprisingly few understood it. Many had difficulty in seeing that Ian was being humorous, and the influence of a little learning about Gender Theory (mainly Lakoff) seems somehow to have led almost all candidates to the belief that Cyril must be a woman.

Careful attention was paid to the pauses, false starts, self-repairs and emphatic stresses of Ian's utterance. But here, as elsewhere, candidates stopped short of explaining precisely how these features constructed the meanings they had inferred. There were therefore many answers which reached Band 4 competence without moving on to Band 5 development.

The mark-scheme provides further examples of features of language which candidates might with profit have identified and explored.

Question 3: *Hawksmoor*

There were a few more answers on *Hawksmoor* this session than in previous sessions. Candidates who study the novel evidently relish Nick Dyer's grim humour and Ackroyd's historical pastiche.

Nick Dyer's barbed conversation with Mr Hayes, after he has 'planted' a letter for him, was paired with a transcription from a local development committee meeting in America.

Nick Dyer's 'voice' was again rather more accurately characterised than Christopher Boone's. Undoubtedly the disjunctions between his 'public' and 'private', and narrative and introspective, voices are more pronounced. In any case, there was some intelligent analysis of construction of voice in terms of lexis and syntax.

Candidates had more difficulty evaluating the relative status of the speakers in both passages, some arguing that Mr Hayes must be the dominant speaker because of his 'expert' knowledge. The 'Chair' in Passage A was similarly assumed to be dominant: assertion was more commonly used than analysis (of turn-taking, utterance length or structure) in support of this view.

The mark-scheme offers examples of further areas for exploration.

Section B

Most candidates answered on *The Great Gatsby*, but there were also substantial numbers of responses on the two other texts. The more general of the following comments on candidates' performance on *The Great Gatsby* apply equally – *mutatis mutandis* – to the other texts.

Question 4: *The Great Gatsby*

The cue-quotation was Nick's initial description of Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker: *The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon.* The question then invited examination of Fitzgerald's presentation of women in *The Great Gatsby*.

A fairly simple approach, taken by many candidates, was to discuss Daisy, Jordan and Myrtle, and to explore differences between them. Fitzgerald's *presentation* of women was thereby addressed, at least indirectly, and by more confident candidates in more explicit detail.

As in previous sessions, however, many candidates damaged their answers by over-simplifying: Daisy is purely materialistic, drinks like a fish and is a poor mother; Nick is reliable/un-judgemental (or unreliable/judgemental); Tom treats Myrtle purely as a sex object/Myrtle regards Tom purely as a source of money. The subtleties of Fitzgerald's presentation are difficult to deal with, but tentative exploration is nearly always more helpful than dogmatic assertion.

Similarly, the multiple possibilities suggested in the cue-quotation were largely ignored in favour of more sweeping statements to the effect that it 'showed' Daisy and Jordan were flappers. Stronger answers grappled with the language, aware that Fitzgerald (and Nick) are seldom serious for more than a clause at a time. Careful readers saw the antithesis between being *buoyed up* and *anchored*, and some went on to explore how the buoyancy lasts only until Tom's entrance.

Passages A and B also repaid careful reading, with only a few candidates noticing the ironic tone: *paint, cigarettes, cocktails, petting parties – oooh!* Comparison between 'Jane' and the

different women in the novel worked well enough when there was attention to detail, but was unhelpful when Daisy or Myrtle was simply equated with the 'typical flapper'.

There was some intelligent integration of the influence of contextual factors (AO3). Thoughtful teaching had instilled in candidates the realisation that *using integrated approaches to explore relationships between texts* is as much AO3 as *analysing and evaluating the significance of contextual factors*; and as a result they were flexible in using ideas and details from Passages A and B to supplement their knowledge of the novel. So the *lawn of her parents' suburban home across which Jane strolls – having just put the car away after driving sixty miles in two hours* – leads easily to Jordan's driving and Gatsby's acres.

Less flexible inclusion of prepared material again tended to be intrusive and awkward, generally offered in discrete compartments (American Dream/Jazz Age/Prohibition/First World War) rather than being integrated. The best advice for this question – and both of the others in Section B – is still first to locate *in* the novel and *in* the passage(s) evidence that the social/cultural/historical context is having some kind of influence, and then to argue from there. Section B questions can be made quite simple. Candidates who start by writing a page on the Rise of the Flapper or the American Dream are making things very hard for themselves.

Question 5: *Wide Sargasso Sea*

A small but significant number of candidates did this question.

The cue-quotation was from the end of the novel, where Antoinette sees her own reflection: "It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her."

The question-wording then invited an examination of Rhys's presentation of self and identity. The supporting passages were extracts from Maslow's influential 1962 work *Toward a Psychology of Being*, and the lyric of a song from the 1966, *Who am I?*

As was the case in the January session, a helpful approach to this question – and to future Section B questions – is to consider lexis and semantics. The cue-quotation, question-wording and passage titles all use words in the semantic field of identity and personality: Passage A takes an analytical approach, Passage B a personal one.

Candidates managed to find some help from applying any one or more of the assertions in Passage A to the situation of Antoinette, or her mother Annette, or indeed to 'Rochester'. The better answers, unsurprisingly, were those which explored textual references rather than expecting them to do the work of explanation un-aided.

The mark-scheme contains suggestions of what might have been fruitful areas for discussion.

Question 6: *A Room with a View*

The question began with a contrast between Lucy and Charlotte in their response to George Emerson.

Charlotte has made a formal bow to George Emerson, to which he is unable to respond. Lucy is touched by this: Perhaps anything that he did would have pleased Lucy, but his awkwardness went straight to her heart; men were not gods after all, but as human and as clumsy as girls; even men might suffer from unexplained desires, and need help.

Report on the Units taken in June 2010

The question then invited a discussion of Forster's presentation of the need for mutual understanding between men and women in *A Room with a View*.

Even candidates who struggled with this question were prepared to explore a range of examples of interaction between men and women in the novel. Better-focused answers concentrated on the idea of mutual (mis-)understanding(s). More advanced readers extended this concept to include the muddle into which old Mr Emerson tells Lucy she has got herself.

Although the extracts which formed Passage A offered an ironic 'take' on the issue, most candidates still tended to take both Alice Duerr Miller and Forster seriously and at face value. Still, the more obviously sexist attitudes – 'Men were meant to be the toilers, /Home, you know, is woman's place' – were a useful starting point for some.

Candidates have been unsure of the historical 'placement' of the novel, referring in previous sessions to Victorian attitudes, but they still managed to discuss shifts in societal attitudes in broadly relevant terms. Some AO3 integration was achieved; but obviously 'prepared' material on Lucy's 'transformation', or on the contrast between Italy and England, tended to be obstructive to a relevant answer.

Reference may be made to the mark-scheme for further ideas.

F672 Changing Texts

As has been the case in the previous two sessions much of the work submitted by candidates for this unit has demonstrated both high level analytical skills and creativity. The best folders were very impressive in their ability to engage in a sophisticated debate on the connections and relationships between texts and to support this with detailed language analysis for Task 1, as well as producing highly imaginative and original creative texts for Task 2. The unit offers great possibilities for candidates to showcase a range of their skills and talents in the subject and many did so with great aplomb.

The previous two Reports for this unit raise several points on possible approaches and reflect upon the excellent practice already demonstrated. These Reports will continue to focus upon that excellent practice and suggest ways in which centres can develop their candidates work in future sessions. It could be helpful to look at this Report alongside the previous ones, as the best approaches will stand out from session to session. How to make the right choices of text for Task 1 has been considered in both previous Reports but it has again this year proved an area of difficulty for some centres. The specification states that candidates should study one literary text and one related multimodal text in order to demonstrate knowledge, analysis and critical understanding. The most successful centres often enable candidates to study a range of literary texts and multimodal versions and in turn produce a variety of multimodal texts for Task 2. It is really impressive course management to teach the skills of textual analysis but also to allow student choice in which particular texts they focus. Not only does this seem to exploit the freedoms of coursework for the candidates, but this autonomy is definitely reflected in the work produced which, almost without exception, tends toward the original rather than the received and the learned rather than the taught. Clearly the experience of sharing a single text with a whole group can be a very worthwhile experience, but in the case of this coursework unit it does seem to lead to certain sameness in the Task 1 discussion and analysis. This collective experience of a text is of course something candidates will be experiencing for units F671 and F673 of this qualification and it does seem the case that for this unit the most interesting and effective work is in response to a variety of texts. Some centres had as many as ten different texts and multimodal versions being studied, several of which were very recently written and non canonical. As mentioned previously it would be fascinating to see the range of texts develop, as confidence and experience of the specification increases.

The written text candidates study can be from any genre, including literary non fiction. Most centres offer prose narrative at the moment, possibly because of the large number of film treatments that can be studied as the related multimodal text. The novel plus film option can be interesting but it can also seem to drive out consideration of other kinds of multimodal transformation of texts. This pairing of text types was significantly the most popular combination in this session. The Coursework Guidance document for this unit, available in the Support Materials section of the website, offers some interesting examples of text combinations and writing outcomes and is helpful in thinking about ideas for broadening the range of texts and tasks.

Most of the work was fairly and realistically assessed showing a good understanding of the assessment criteria. Very few candidates were awarded marks in Band 1 and not many in Band 2 and this reflected the generally sound understanding of the requirements and expectations of the unit that most centres now have.

Task 1: Analytical Study

In Task 1 candidates explore the relationships between the original text and the multimodal version and focus upon the factors that have shaped the multimodal version. This focus is

reflected in the weighting of A03 for this task. In the 1000 to 1500 words candidates have for this task it is impossible to compare all aspects of both texts and the most effective work in this session concentrated on analysing key moments in each. To concentrate the study on how the multimodal text reworks a specific moment in the original text allows candidates to make very specific comments on language choices in the written text and the effects created by utilising other modes in the second version. A good approach to this might be to compare two specific passages, one from each of the original and multimodal text. An exploration of what has changed and how these changes have been conditioned by the new communicative modes utilised would enable candidates to focus very specifically on AO3. A detailed comparison of this kind would also allow candidates to explore language choices and utilise the critical terminology, particularly linguistic, that is required for high level AO1 achievement.

Task 1 needs both to discuss issues of multimodality theoretically (in the words of the specification, to 'explore ways in which literary texts are constantly being reinvented and reinterpreted for different audiences and purposes') and to illustrate this debate by detailed examples from the chosen texts. Candidates should be using critical terminology in AO1 for this task: higher band responses confidently use a range of linguistic terminology. Expertise gained from unit F671 on the construction of voice in different texts is often very effectively applied by candidates and the terminology of discourse analysis is confidently used. Film terminology and other types of media language can be very helpful in describing effects in the multimodal text and many candidates used these terms effectively. As mentioned in a previous report, it is clear that some centres are specifically teaching a range of appropriate terminology to allow their candidates to explore texts in other modes with the degree of precision that linguistic analysis gives them with the written text. It is usually the case that this lifts the achievement of all candidates, across the mark bands, as it prevents comment that is vague and generalised.

Task 2 Multimodal text with commentary

Some highly creative writing was submitted for this task, including web pages, graphic novel treatments, articles for a variety of different audiences, and many different kinds of script. At their best these tasks show real imagination and creativity and emerge naturally from the discoveries made about text transformation for Task 1. Play scripts and film scripts were the most popular forms submitted. In order to meet the specification requirement that at least two different modes are used it is important that visual and aural elements are foregrounded and an integral part of the text that is produced. To this end a storyboard approach to a film script extract can work very well. Play scripts can be problematic in this regard, as they are not really multimodal in form. Obviously a script in performance would be so, and some kind of review of that performance including some of the text and examples or descriptions of the visual and aural elements might work better than the script itself. As mentioned in previous Reports, the creation of *faux* transcripts is problematic too. Transcripts are fine if a genuine record of a speech event that has been produced, but a transcription of an imagined 'spontaneous' interview does not work as it has no meaningful purpose and tends to be derivative rather than creative. A transcript should record rather than replicate speech.

The maximum word count for Task 2 can be divided between the creative writing and the commentary. Some of the forms produced will be shorter than others and this can be compensated for by a longer commentary. The 20 marks available for Task 2 can also be awarded holistically across the two parts of the submission. Commentaries need to be substantial in their explanation and evaluation of the choices made and should be analytical in approach. Some candidates are submitting commentaries that are mere logs of the process of text production, rather than detailed analyses. AO1 requires the application of concepts and terminology from integrated linguistic and literary study.

Script annotation

Most folders had pleasingly detailed, thorough and helpful teacher annotation and summative comments. Some centres had devised their own internal sheets for comments and standardisation and the best of these were impressively thorough. Moderators value annotation very highly, as without it there is little clue as to the thinking behind the mark awarded. The best annotation draws from AO band descriptors but develops the comment to explain how the candidate has achieved this level. Annotation should be thought of as a dialogue with the moderator rather than the candidate. To congratulate a candidate on impressive work is something all teachers would wish to do, but has little to do with the processes of moderation.

Administrative issues

- It is important that the published deadlines for submitting marks and sending the sample of work to the moderator are adhered to. Delays were again caused by moderators having to contact centres about dispatch of the sample.
- Coursework cover sheets should be filled out in detail indicating the texts studied and including a clear explanation of the candidate's own multimodal text. Candidate numbers were missing from many cover sheets; it is important that these are carefully filled in. The summative comments box should seek to justify the overall mark out of 40 that has been awarded.
- Work needs to be clearly labeled Task 1, Task 2 and Commentary and presented by the candidate in that order.
- Folders need to be fastened securely. Paper clips are not satisfactory. Please avoid sending work in plastic wallets or bulky folders.

F673 Dramatic Voices

General Comments

In overall terms the first major session for this new Paper has confirmed the impression given by January's smaller entry: that centres have both understood the Paper's specific requirements and embraced the spirit of an integrated approach to linguistic and literary study. Candidates' knowledge and understanding of their selected texts was very frequently impressive, especially given that this is a closed text examination. Particularly pleasing was the dexterity shown by many in exploring relationships between texts and in constructing cohesive and coherent arguments that incorporated close analysis of selected passages, included broader consideration of whole-text issues and developed further discussion of relevant contextual materials. Disappointingly, some candidates opted not to engage with the linguistic richness and detail provided by the passages themselves in Section A: an opportunity that clearly must not be overlooked. The analysis and evaluation of contextual factors was handled in a variety of ways and with markedly different levels of success. The least helpful approach in this regard was to 'front-load' answers with pre-packaged, largely undigested historical 'facts' of, in some cases, questionable accuracy. Candidates who integrate (rather than disgorge) carefully researched contextual materials in apposite, discriminating and illuminating ways are always likely to be more generously rewarded.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Most frequently chosen, this question prompted many knowledgeable, thoughtful responses. Only the best candidates anchored their answers in close comparative analysis of specific linguistic details and dramatic effects, however. Most judged that these passages represent climactic or pivotal moments of crisis and/or resolution. Weaker answers attempted to offer ready similarities regarding the presentation of the states of mind/feelings of both Dr Faustus and John Proctor. Better answers probed for telling distinctions - psychological, spiritual and contextual. Some candidates interpreted 'self-knowledge' to be scholarly knowledge, self-confidence, or the protagonists' awareness of what is happening around them; these answers tended to be under-developed or one-dimensional.
- 2 Not quite as frequently chosen, this question was, nevertheless, generally answered well. As was to be hoped (and indeed, expected), candidates' responses tended to be grounded in a secure knowledge of a range of inter-textual structures, contrasts, resonances and ironies. Interestingly, most seemed to be more comfortable exploring salient details of language from the Stoppard passage and sometimes missed opportunities to engage with the richness and complexities of Hamlet's 'voice(s)'. Most impressive, however, was how most answers were developed and extended, through thoughtful thematic reference within/between both plays. There was too, some intelligent consideration of aspects the Elizabethan religious background and 'worldview', alongside with and in contraposition to Stoppard's indebtedness to existentialist thought and Absurdist theatre.
- 3 A touch less popular, this question again prompted answers of divergent quality. At the top end there were some highly sophisticated discussions of a range of attitudes, and of how these are embodied and expressed in individual voices. Bosola's language choices, in particular, were rightly and rigorously brought under very close scrutiny and there was some very fruitful consideration of the immediate and wider significance of gender in both plays. Better answers were able to make subtle and incisive discriminations in their

analyses of different attitudes within the Churchill passage: tone, register, grammatical and semantic features were explored with some perceptivity. Weaker answers demonstrated a fairly superficial understanding of the centrality of the theme and its development in both plays.

- 4 A very popular choice, yet this question was not handled with great assurance. Whilst the majority of candidates opted to focus on *The Crucible*, those who plumped for *Dr Faustus* tended to produce the better quality responses. There was a clearer understanding of what was at stake within the individual consciousness of Dr Faustus: his dilemmas, decisions and values - real or imagined. Candidates offered a good range of individual interpretations and supported their arguments more substantially and convincingly, with plausible and sometimes very creditable contextual reference. However, whilst some of those who focused on *The Crucible* had clearly understood the importance of social mores, they did not go on to examine specific conflicts in values with real incisiveness or precision. Examiners found it harder to reward answers that faltered because of candidates' insecure or muddled setting out of parameters: where 'worldly' was construed to mean 'having good sense' or 'being a good person' for example, and/or 'spiritual' to mean 'witchcraft' or 'spiritualism', the quality of argument advanced tended to suffer.
- 5 Candidates who opted for this question were divided fairly evenly in terms of their text selection, and their answers frequently demonstrated evidence of independent thought and research. 'Uncertainty' (psychological, ontological, situational and political, for example) was explored helpfully and interestingly. Candidates preferred to place emphasis on the word 'trust' from the prompt quotation and this led to some fascinating explorations of a range of meta-dramatic ironies in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and political disequilibrium, 'rotteness' and paranoia in *Hamlet*. There were relatively few weak answers in response to this question; the majority were knowledgeable and well informed, both textually and contextually. The weakest answers tended merely to 're-cycle' materials and ideas already brought to the table in Section A.
- 6 Again, both texts were chosen in fairly equal measure and there were a good number of confident and persuasive explorations. Understandably and appropriately the Duchess, Griselda and Angie were the chosen focus of the majority of candidates. The experiences of other characters were also considered, however - sometimes with real perspicacity. At the level of context, candidates were more assured in examining and evaluating the significance of Britain's political climate in 1980s and contemporaneous developments in the feminist movement. Interestingly, whereas Question 5's cue quotation was exploited with very precise focus, candidates did not, on the whole, make the most of opportunities to engage with real acumen or sensitivity with the implications of Question 6's 'frightening': the horrific/gothic aspects of presentation in *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example, or the more destructive and macabre elements of *Top Girls*.

F674 Connections Across Texts

General Comments

For the most part centres have settled well to the requirements of the new specification, and in particular to this new unit. Some have really taken flight with the opportunities offered, others have been rather more cautious, either sticking quite closely to the examples of suitable topics provided, or ensuring that all candidates did at least one text in common so that there could be some element of teacher led, taught input. As might be expected, moderators found that centres had been quite generous with their candidates' work this year, and the temptation to scale work was perhaps stronger than it has been for some years with the old specification. The general feeling from the moderation team was that opportunities had been missed when assignments were set up, particularly in relation to Task 1, which is perhaps the most difficult part of the unit to get hold of coherently, both for teachers and students. Moderators recognise that units take a little while to establish themselves, and that the candidates who participate in the first year's session should not find themselves disadvantaged by being guinea pigs. With luck, what follows will act as a useful guide to centres as they start work with the 2011 candidates.

For next time, centres should note that there is an absolute requirement that spoken language should be dealt with at some point in the unit. This does not simply mean that there must be a text that includes spoken language or its representation in literary or non-literary text. Candidates must actually write about spoken language and its conventions. All too often there was spoken language, but the candidate was more interested in the issue that it raised (because it linked thematically with the other pieces chosen in Task 1, or it was an incidental part of a story in Task 2) and thus the rules/ conventions/ representation of speech were never considered in Task 1 or in the Task 2 commentary. This was a serious lack across a number of folders, and centres need to think quite hard about how it can be more fully integrated in future sessions. Centres are reminded, too, that texts chosen for Task 1 should have originally been written in English: issues of translation/cultural transference cannot be avoided if they were not originally in English, and such concerns, though fascinating, are outside the scope of this particular unit.

Task 1

Choices of text for Task 1 proved problematic for some centres. The specification is explicit: there should be a 'substantial text' that is studied and supplemented by the comparison with other texts to include (depending on how a centre sees the whole unit), a literary text, spoken English and non-literary material. What seems to work best in terms of clarity of purpose is work which deals with three texts, one literary (often not as the 'substantial text'), one non-literary, one spoken. It is, of course, perfectly legitimate to 'perm' combinations across the whole unit, but some centres had failed to notice the requirement on page 17 of the specification that if candidates do not do a spoken text or a non-literary text in Task 1, then coverage of these sorts of texts becomes *COMPULSORY* in Task 2.

Even without taking into account the requirement that this substantial text be non-canonical but culturally significant, for several centres that there was no clear 'substantial text' against which the supporting texts were being discussed. The specification states that this text should be the 'starting point' of the study and it should be one that is 'chosen to extend the range of texts across the whole qualification'. Several centres paid insufficient attention to this and Task 1 became a comparative study of three relatively short texts. The implication of the term 'substantial text' is that it should make real demands of the candidate in terms of complexity of response. In effect, it should be a text that would take quite some time to teach if it was set for an examination. Thus at times candidates who had chosen quite short pieces or, perhaps,

pieces from books produced as TV tie ins found that when they really got down to it, there was not very much to say.

The intriguing notion of what constitutes cultural significance (possibly centred on how and why some texts become accepted as a part of a literary canon) was a debate that was under-represented in Task 1. It is central to the unit and there is a clear expectation in the third bullet point regarding Task 1 on page 16 of the specification that this should be the case. In their work, candidates need to interrogate explicitly notions of cultural significance and the ways we ascribe value to certain kinds of text. This debate should condition the choices of text for this unit. Centres should be aware too that this instruction is not a reason for candidates to fill in contextual background to the texts; rather, it is an invitation to see texts as products of/responses to the circumstances that produce them. The best way to deal with this is to argue outwards from details in the texts themselves, thus securing AO3 (the dominant objective here) into the texture of the Task.

It is impossible for OCR, or moderators, to be arbiter on notions of cultural significance (whose culture? what sort of significance?) and it is up to candidates to make the case for their particular text being culturally significant, as well as exploring reasons for its non-canonical status. There was very little such discussion of these issues in much of what Moderators read: too often the task became a rather obvious and descriptive account of the content of the three texts. The task, framed in more precise, specification focused terms, demands detailed language discussion utilising linguistic terminology that will then enable candidates to deal fully with AO1.

One of the key discriminators at the top end is a candidate's ability to balance all three pieces through comparison. The unit is called 'Connections Across Texts' and this therefore means that candidates should not be highly rewarded for taking three texts and then simply writing about them consecutively. Some candidates only offered a substantial text and then one other text, and this was, of course, technically a rubric error, self-penalizing because it meant that arguments were limited to a two text comparison. A generous view of both these difficulties was taken this time round, as this was the first full session of the unit. Page 16 of the specification is useful here. It talks about 'a written study exploring relationships between the substantial text and other types of text that have been chosen for the purposes of comparison and contrast.' The term 'other types of texts' makes it clear that there must be genre variation, or that if there is only one other 'type' then there should be 'texts' (plural) within that.

As far as literary texts used as the 'substantial text' are concerned, there were some useful pieces on Swift, on *Trainspotting*, on *In Cold Blood* which entered fully into discussions about why these texts sit awkwardly in relation to ideas of canon or acceptability. Elsewhere there were perfectly acceptable examples of awkward texts – Scott's diaries, for example – which then did not enter into discussion of how a diary can be written in an explicitly literary fashion, using literary techniques, in order to shape a narrative and create specific effects on a reader. Texts that plainly ARE part of the canon (1984 perhaps) can of course feature but they should not be the 'substantial text.'

Perhaps the key message to be communicated is that candidates need a clear question in mind as they start to address the task. Simply saying 'compare' x with y and z won't quite do. The focus needs to be explicit and have some key words within it that will force candidates to analyse form, structure and language (AO2) by using the insights they have gained from a wide variety of other reading (AO1).

Task 2

On the whole, this element of the unit proved more straightforward. However, one or two points still need to be made. The specification is quite clear that the creative piece should be ‘an outcome of the study undertaken for Task 1’, and thus the commentary needs to make some concession to the links. At times this was not clear. One or two centres (or candidates within centres) seemed to be under the impression that the creative writing had to be in some sense multi-modal – this is true of F672, but not here. There was a wide range of types of writing submitted here, from scripts (the monologue again proves popular) and short stories, to articles for newspapers, travel writing, radio plays, study guides, speeches, etc. Commentaries were sometimes quite thin, describing rather than analysing. Centres need to be clear that ALL the AO1 marks are located here, so candidates need to write very pithily, focusing absolutely clearly on integrated responses from literary and linguistic study and on critical analysis. There is no space here for a ‘production diary’ type of approach.

Marking

In the first full session of any unit, there is always likely to be uncertainty, and this was the case here. On the whole, centres annotated well, but it was clear that at times the full implications (see elsewhere in this Report) of the unit specification had not been seen, and thus marks were likely to be at the edge of tolerance (or beyond in a small number of cases). Moderators applied common sense here, recognizing that the new specification demands a ‘step change’ from the unit which F674 replaces, and so there was a willingness on their part to see the work positively, rather than criticise it for the niggling absences or failures to get the emphasis quite right.

Having said that, during the course of the next few months, OCR will be producing exemplar material, and centres are urged to make use of this when setting assignments and marking in future sessions.

Centres that annotated the margins of the work, making qualitative judgements as well as simply noting that an AO had been hit, tended to be more accurate in their overall judgements at the end. On the whole, coversheets were helpfully filled in and it was easy to see why particular aspects of the work had been rewarded.

The fact that a centre’s work has not been scaled is not necessarily an indication that marks were absolutely right and that the work was fully on target. Rather, in some cases, it is a sign that moderators felt that centres had made a good start and would gradually settle to the full requirements of the unit. Centres will have received a report on the performance of their own candidates, and a hint about generosity or being near the edge of tolerance will have been included: this is a coded warning for future sessions.

Administration

One or two things that might seem entirely trivial would help make the moderator’s life easier. Firstly, course work should be submitted in such a way that the pages can be easily turned, with tasks within the folder clearly labelled and in the right order. Secondly, it would be enormously helpful to have the folders in candidate order and with the candidate numbers clearly given in the space provided on the cover sheet. Even if the same moderator is being sent work for both this unit and for F672, they should be sent in separate packages. Centres are reminded that transcription of marks should be carefully done: one mark mistranscribed from a coversheet can, if not spotted, lead to a whole centre scaling.

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