

# English Literature

Advanced GCE A2 H471

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H071

## OCR Report to Centres

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**June 2012**

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS/A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, OCR Nationals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching/training, administration and secretarial skills.

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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## CONTENTS

Advanced GCE English Literature (H471)

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### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
Overview	1
F661 Poetry and Prose 1800–1945	2
F662 Literature post-1900	8
F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800	13
F664 Texts in Time	20

## Overview

Once again, there has been an increase in entry for all four units, and Principals have again been impressed by the quality of response from candidates. In particular, work on the new texts for F661 has been assured and effective, especially in relation to the new prose texts. Centres and candidates seem to have made good use of the support materials available on the website, using them as a basis for insight and understanding, but also supplementing them with additional material based on work done individually and within centres.

Once again it is necessary to mention in this report the issue of the 3,000 word limit for coursework submissions: both Principal Moderators have noted an increase of overlength essays, and a significant number of centres this session have experienced the inconvenience and even distress of having to re-mark all of their coursework submissions as the result of an overlength folder having been called for moderation. Centres are reminded that, in the interests of fairness to all candidates, there can be no allowance made in relation to this requirement.

The Principals of the examined units have been pleased to note an improvement in candidates' knowledge of and reference to their primary texts (this issue was highlighted in reports and training following last summer's session). Centres are now advised to target poetry as a particular area for improvement: all Principals have noted a lack of confidence in many candidates when writing on poetry, and a tendency to overlook some important qualities of this genre (for example, many candidates quote poetry as if it were prose, with no attention to lineation). The highest achieving candidates are notable for their evident understanding of and sensitive response to the qualities of the poetry texts they have studied (more detail relating to response to poetry will follow in reports on individual units).

Finally, centres are reminded that January 2013 will be the last opportunity for candidates to sit F663 with the original set texts; those studying the new list will need to wait for June before they have an opportunity for examination. Support materials are available on the website in relation to the new F663 texts. Centres may need to revise their coursework choices in the light of changes to the set text list; as ever, the Coursework Consultancy is available to advise.

## F661 Poetry and Prose 1800–1945

### General Comments

The change of texts has worked very well and examiners were impressed by the smooth transition achieved by centres. One examiner noted that ‘the level of response from candidates was broadly comparable to that elicited by the former set text list’; teachers are to be congratulated for the substantial and impressive work done in centres to enable this sustained quality.

Many candidates performed at a very high level on poetry, showing both a technical understanding of poetic method and an imaginative engagement with literary quality. Weaker answers gave rise to two major concerns this session, however: increasingly, some candidates are analysing individual words and phrases in complete isolation from the rest of the poem, often in a way which makes it unclear whether the poem as a whole has been understood at all. Candidates are advised to ensure that they offer a connected reading, where words and phrases are understood in the context of the sentences in which they appear. The second concern is that examiners have found evidence that some candidates are relying on material gathered from internet searches which is of very doubtful quality. Analyses of many poems may be found by using a search engine, but candidates should be aware that the results of such searches have no guarantees as to quality, and that the use of such material in an answer may do more harm than good.

In answers on the novel, multiple readings (feminist; Marxist; post-colonial) were again represented including, for the first time for many of us, Queer Theory and Disability Theory. Done well, a theoretical approach can be effective and exciting; its success in this session depended, as ever, on the relevance of answers to the primary text and the question. Centres are reminded that AO3 can be fulfilled at the highest level through the candidate’s own argument, and there is no requirement in F661 to refer to theoretical approaches or literary criticism. The best answers, as with the poetry, showed (in addition to an awareness and understanding of context and critical debate) an imaginative engagement with the literary qualities of the novel.

### Comments on individual questions

#### 1 Robert Browning: ‘Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister’

This was the least popular of the poetry options, but often done very well, with good answers focusing on the hypocrisy of the speaker and his pious nature. Candidates picked up on the humour of the poem and the implicit nature of the speaker’s feelings revealing more of himself than his peer. Contextual factors surrounding the poem (religion; setting) were often kept well in view, and many picked up successfully on the humorous, satirical tone of the poem. The best answers were attentive to poetic method: for example, the emphatic style of the speaking voice with its questions and exclamations; some weaker answers depended on the poem’s narrative to establish the speaker’s character, with the result that AO2 was rather limited. The most popular poem for comparison was ‘The Bishop Orders his Tomb at St. Praxed’s Church’. Examiners were alert to the challenge of writing on such a long poem; candidates were not expected to deal with the entire poem, and the best were inclined to consider both the beginning and the end, and a judicious selection from the material in between.

## 2 **Emily Dickinson: 'A Bird came down the Walk'**

This was a very popular choice, and a wide range of responses was seen. Dickinson herself seemed to be a figure of fascination for candidates – far removed from anything they had experienced personally. Various, her 'Calvinism', 'paganism', 'naturism' and 'lesbianism' were frequently considered; in some answers, fascination with biography was allowed to dominate at the expense of response to poetry. Weaker answers were surprisingly ready to ignore whole stanzas of the poem, especially the last one; candidates studying this writer are advised that such short poems are expected to receive a very thorough analysis. Stronger candidates provided such thoroughness, offering a remarkably detailed and imaginative response. One excellent answer explained that the imagery in the last stanza 'provides a cross in the elements of air and water and a moment of unfathomable beauty'; another that 'in the third stanza, the rhyme scheme is interrupted – as if the poem is startled like the bird'.

## 3 **Edward Thomas: 'Tears'**

There was a very wide spread of responses to this poem. Many answers did consider the meanings of the two incidents described in the poem and the relations between them, but a surprising number did not do this, concentrating on picking out 'emotional' language/imagery unrelated to origin in experiences. A significant number of answers were flawed by a determination to jump straight to a perceived subtext without sufficient examination of the text itself: candidates should ensure that they have understood the surface meaning of the text, and be wary of making assertions ('the hounds are English soldiers'; 'the hops symbolise Germans') without offering some justification. Many answers included contextual knowledge about Thomas and his own melancholy; better students did not allow this to become the focus of their answer. Sensitive answers made much of the end of poem, describing 'truths I had not dreamed' as an epiphany, and suggesting that the fact these truths were 'forgotten' by the poet could be read as both tragic and liberating; the propensity to forget was often related to 'Old Man' ("I have mislaid the key ...").

## 4 **W. B. Yeats: 'The Wild Swans at Coole'**

This was a very popular option, and many examiners were impressed by the breadth and depth of knowledge displayed by candidates. Amongst weaker answers, some were tempted to over-play history, politics and biography at the expense of poetry; others were more literary, but inclined to neglect the question's focus on 'change'. However, in many answers there was a real sense of response and enjoyment, coupled with detailed and precise readings of poetic effects. It was often a sign of a good answer that the drama of the birds' take-off was conveyed. Many answers were extremely well-informed and sympathetic to Yeats's poetic project, beyond the achievements of individual poems: for example, one candidate wrote that 'There are many contrasts in the representation of the swans: youth and freshness but also an eternal cycle; stillness and calmness but also excitement; withstanding time and continuity but also passion and freedom. This reflects Yeats's eternal struggle, he is unsatisfied with life and is always searching for more answers, more ways to preserve things he find precious. He explores thoughts from philosophers and even turns to the Sages. He believes his art is what will live on.'

## 5 **Mary Shelley: *Frankenstein***

Question 5(a) *'The suffering in Frankenstein is undeserved.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Shelley's presentation of suffering?

This was a very popular question, and candidates often wrote responses of striking length and detail. A lot of work had been done on critical views and contexts for this novel, with the result that the text itself sometimes seemed to be lost among the competing approaches suggested by candidates; the best answers were distinguished by a thorough consideration of the primary text, supplying relevant critical and contextual material in support of the answer. Some of the best answers explored how Shelley's narrative structure encourages sympathy for the monster's suffering from readers. The Romantic context was helpful in debates about society's treatment of outsiders and many candidates usefully explored the idea of the "noble savage". Frankenstein's vanity and selfishness were often explored as reasons for him being justly punished in the novel.

Question 5(b) *'The use of three narrators contributes significantly to the novel's atmosphere of mystery.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of Shelley's presentation of suffering?

There were far fewer responses to this question. Candidates were often inclined to offer (apparently) prepared discussions on narrative method, but these were rarely tied to the novel's atmosphere of mystery. Only a few tackled this, often with remarkable flair: one candidate focused squarely on mystery and the 'reader's altered perceptions' as the novel progresses, suggesting that 'there is a sense in which we are never allowed to know precisely what the author intends'.

## 6 Charlotte Brontë: *Jane Eyre*

Question 6(a) *'Above all, Jane Eyre is a love story.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

This was a very popular question. Most answers agreed, some reluctantly, that the novel is a love story, though there was a good deal of discussion about the status of this aspect 'above all' others, in view of a range of other identified concerns: for example the position of women in society and Jane's negotiations with social expectations; family and class relations; religious belief and associated conflicts; hypocrisies and institutions. Answers traced Jane's progress through the novel as 'a search for love', ending in love on equal terms at Ferndean. Many answers noted that this is the classic 'love story' structure; others located the structure within the conventions of the gothic genre, Bertha being the "hidden secret" eventually revealed and overcome (the *doubling* effect between Bertha and Jane was also neatly fitted into this tradition). Others felt that the *Bildungsroman* lineage of the novel – Jane's progress towards mature self-realisation – took precedence over the love story. Many of the answers to this question were thoughtful, well argued and very well informed.

Question 6(b) *'The novel's settings reflect Jane's powerful emotions.'* In the light of this comment, discuss the significance of the settings in *Jane Eyre*.

Fewer answers here, mostly following a narrative trajectory assessing each setting in relation to the question. Some argued forcefully that the settings – and Jane's experiences while she is part of them – do not simply *reflect* Jane's emotions but actively contribute to their development and definition; they determine what she becomes. Weaker answers were sometimes reduced to a narrative account of Jane's experiences in different settings, neglecting to consider the element of 'powerful emotions'.

## 7 Henry James: *The Turn of the Screw*

Question 7(a) *'The ghosts represent feelings which are usually suppressed.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of *The Turn of the Screw*?

This was a popular question. Feelings and their suppression led many candidates to consider Freudian readings of the novel and to present a range of speculation about the sexual preferences of the author. Sexual feelings were usually the focus of answers, and the symbolism of places such as the lake and the tower – and of incidents like the construction of Flora’s toy boat – was emphasised. Some weaker candidates seemed to misunderstand the specific meaning of ‘suppressed’ but in nearly every case sensible inference had been made and a general viewpoint was conveyed about the idea of the ghosts manifesting thoughts which had been untried in other characters (mainly the governess). Contextual observations about the place of a governess “in Victorian society” were frequently presented. Answers on this text were often rather ‘forensic’ in character: most candidates seemed anxious to present the evidence in support of/against different readings, but only the best engaged with the imaginative qualities of the text.

Question 7(b) *‘The governess is both too frightened and too vulnerable to tell her story reliably.’ How far and in what ways do you agree with this comment on the role of the governess in The Turn of the Screw?*

This option was less popular. Candidates who attempted it often thought they could see what the question was driving at, but missed one or more important elements: for example, many answers concentrated on the fact that a wide range of possible interpretations of the text is possible, and avoided significant discussion of narrative method. Generalised character sketches of a frightened, vulnerable Governess were common but rarely rose above the ‘competent’ level. More successful answers explored the governess’s weaknesses of character with detailed support from the novel; they also examined separately the terms ‘frightened’ and ‘vulnerable’, and focused on narrative method as the central issue of the essay. Some candidates made good reference to film, television and operatic versions of the text.

## **8 Oscar Wilde: *The Picture of Dorian Gray***

Question 8(a) *‘Dorian Gray’s attempt to become a living work of art is doomed to failure.’ In the light of this comment, discuss Wilde’s presentation of life and art in the novel.*

Candidates were well prepared to discuss relations between life and art in the text, and many presented fairly general discussion of the topic, often taking an item from the Preface as a beginning, particularly ‘There is no such thing as a moral or immoral book’ and ‘No artist has ethical sympathies’. In effect, many answers argued that there is a moral to be read from the text: ‘As Dorian becomes more corrupt he destroys two works of art, the painting and himself’; ‘Dorian becomes not a living work of art but the artist to his own cursed portrait’. Many answers compared Dorian to Faust, therefore following from the beginning a doomed narrative; some argued that, as one candidate put it, Sibyl is ‘a mirror for Dorian ... her suicide foreshadows his death ... she lives as a work of art, becomes a third rate actress with a pretty face’. Some tested the roles that Basil Hallward and Henry Wotton play in Dorian’s experience, positioning Hallward as the good angel, protecting Dorian against Wotton’s influence: one offered an interesting argument that Wotton in relation to Dorian is the real ‘artist’ with no ‘ethical sympathies’, fashioning Dorian as he would like to be himself. Weaker answers struggled with the more conceptual aspects of this question, and preferred to outline the narrative with particular focus on Dorian’s Faustian pact.

Question 8(b) *‘The novel’s contrasting settings portray a gulf between social classes in Victorian society.’ How far and in what ways do you agree with this view of The Picture of Dorian Gray?*

This question generated some well organised and well informed answers, exploring contrasting settings (for example the luxury of Henry's house and garden compared with the Vanes' household and furnishings; the theatre with the opera house). Dorian's moral descent was measured against his visits to the East End and the opium dens, noting that this is where the classes mix, across the social gulf. Some pointed out that members of the lower order are more emotionally literate than the aristocrats (for example, James Vane's unconditional love for his sister). Weaker answers were inclined to focus on class (about which some confusion was evident), and to ignore setting.

## 9 Joseph Conrad: *The Secret Agent*

Question 9(a) *'The Secret Agent is a study in human isolation.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

Relatively few examiners saw work on this text. Most candidates agreed with the prompt quotation and conveyed this by providing a list of generalised character sketches. There were one or two attempts to construct a theory about broader Modernist views of the individual isolated and purposeless in society. Many answers noted Conrad's statement that the novel is the story of Winnie Verloc, and explored the developing stages of her isolation: a loveless, incommunicative marriage, undertaken to protect her brother; the loss of Stevie, removing the purpose of her life; the murder of Verloc; the lonely suicide. Stevie himself was another fruitful example, and answers reviewed other characters in turn, Verloc, the other "revolutionaries", even Chief Inspector Heat. There was one particularly illuminating comment on the structure of the text: "Because of the episodic nature of the novel we see characters for intense yet short periods of time, then they disappear into the anonymous mass of Londoners".

Question 9(b) *'There is a disturbing and unexpected element of humour in The Secret Agent.'* How far and in what ways do you agree with this view?

One examiner reported that 'answers to this question tended to be a collection of "funny moments" and "comic characters", sometimes rather strained, but better answers picked up on "disturbing" and saw how such details add to the darkness of the vision'. Better candidates seemed to show a real appreciation of Conrad's sardonic humour, picking out moments of narrative observation (such as the customer who, "disconcerted at having to deal with a woman, and with rage in his heart", would buy a useless over-priced article which "he would drop stealthily into the gutter"); and noticing as more disturbing humour 'the macabre description of Stevie's remains'.

## 10 Virginia Woolf: *Mrs Dalloway*

Question 10(a) *'We have all had a tremendous jolt.'* How far and in what ways does Woolf suggest that the 'jolt' of World War I is still felt by the characters in *Mrs Dalloway*?

Most candidates wrote very well on this text. Septimus Smith naturally took centre stage in most answers to this question, presented as a symbol of the persisting effects of WW1, physical and psychological; his wife Rezia's suffering featured as an indirect consequence of the war; and the behaviour of the two doctors (Woolf at her most critical) was found to indicate postwar preference for passing over and 'moving on'. Many answers noted that Peter Walsh perceives change in London society after his experience of Britain's other foreign enterprise, and some pointed to Elizabeth, whom her father at the party barely recognises ('who is that lovely girl?') as a symbol of the new generation. Many also suggested symbolic value in the novel's opening as Clarissa Dalloway, having been ill, plunges back into 'life; London; this moment of June ... The war was over'.

Question 10(b) *'My tunnelling process, by which I tell the past by instalments, as I have need of it.'* In the light of this comment by Virginia Woolf, discuss her narrative method in Mrs Dalloway.

Again, there was often a confidence about work on Woolf's narrative method: one examiner noted that 'it was a pleasure to read many thoughtful and knowledgeable answers to both of these questions'. The answers did fall into two groups, however: those who took full account of the question's quotation from Woolf about her 'tunnelling process' and privileged in discussion ways in which she deals with the past; and those who were inclined to write more generally about free indirect discourse or stream of consciousness. The former were more precise and effective, but the latter also included some sophisticated literary discussion.

## F662 Literature post-1900

F662 continues to offer adventurous and inspiring opportunities for candidates to develop literary expertise and to investigate post 1900 literature. Many centres took advantage of these opportunities to refresh text choices and tasks, and to make changes in combinations of texts. Some of these were thematically linked, but not all – indeed, some centres chose their material for the Linked Texts essays on the principle of interesting contrasts rather than connections. There were more combinations of critical and re-creative work within a sample, as well as more variations of titles used with the same text within centres, which suggests the advice of the Coursework Consultancy to provide a range of tasks to promote ownership of the writing among candidates has been heeded. There was evidence of a broader range of poetry texts as well as interesting combinations of genres.

However, some centres do need to read the requirements of the specification more carefully, make use of the free OCR Coursework Consultancy if advised, and attend more diligently to administrative matters. In terms of common rubric infringements, centres are reminded that three texts must be studied overall, one text in Task 1 and two different texts in Task 2. Any text which appears on the set texts lists should not be selected for F662 coursework study, regardless of whether that particular text was studied for the examination. Overlength folders are becoming a very common problem; where seen at moderation, these will be referred back to centres for re-marking.

### Task 1

Close Reading for Task 1 was very confidently handled by the majority of centres. Most candidates clearly knew their texts and could write with intelligence and perception about issues and details in a selected extract. More highly achieving candidates looked systematically at matters of form, structure and language; the best were able to write with insight and sensitivity about a writer's craft while addressing a specific task or question. Less assured candidates included some narrative in their answers, displaying a less effective use of critical terminology, analytical language, and methods (AO2). Good answers discussed the layers of meaning and contrasts or developments, both within the passage and in terms of links between the passage and the whole text. They also demonstrated understanding of aspects of the genre chosen immediately and could provide an insight into how representative the extract or poem might be, and how characteristic it is of the writer's oeuvre or artistic achievement. In discussions of prose, matters of storytelling, narrative decisions and the arrangement of material featured strongly in worthy answers whereas weaker responses remained at the level of explaining aspects of plot and character.

In dealing with fiction, key areas are an exploration of narrative style, the use of time and shifts of perspective. For poetry analyses, there should be some engagement with verse form and the aural effects/choices. With drama answers, the form/genre should announce itself, which can be managed in a straightforward or more sophisticated manner by some sense of the staging, the lighting, the sounds, the movements, the pauses.

Centres and candidates will find it useful to consider which texts have interesting passages/poems for the extract-based questions when they are selecting their text for this task. Moreover there are some passages/poems that are better than others – a thought to bear in mind with every text. In some instances, there was a sense this session that passages had been selected by the candidates themselves and not always wisely chosen. Some passages were too long or too short; some lacked the richness in style that would yield a more probing response. Challenging text choices sometimes lift the students' scope of engagement because the style and composition of the text demand more ambition or more penetrative reading.

On the whole, there was much good practice in task-setting and it is pleasing that more and more centres make use of the Coursework Consultancy to hone and focus their questions. Many centres set critical tasks that enabled candidates to “analyse” or “discuss”, sensibly avoiding the words “describe” or “examine” or “explain” in the title. The themes and stylistic features of the focus passage must be related to the whole text or a range of poems from a collection, in order to meet the requirements of the Specification in regard to whole textual understanding (AO1). Setting a task that encourages a discussion of the selected passage in relation to the wider text helps candidates to address the Assessment Objectives more readily.

Most of the tasks seen in this June series were thoughtfully worded. Nonetheless there are still essays that have no title and this is not helpful. Moreover, the wording of some assignments to include contextual issues tended to shift the focus of the response away from literary ideas; this is a growing trend which needs redress. Centres need to be more aware that AO4 is not assessed in Task 1, so context should not be foregrounded in the first folder item; nor is Task 1 normally comparative, so it is inadvisable to create a task which sets up a comparison between two or three poems if this leads to general assertion rather than close reading. Centres are advised to consult the Coursework Consultancy if they need further advice on task setting, particularly achieving an appropriate focus if they need to use two poems rather than one as the basis of the Critical Piece.

Task 1 also offers Re-creative Writing as another route to achievement, and many centres have become specialist in re-creative practice. For those seeking to improve, a clear grasp of the expectations of this task is obtainable by paying attention to the specification guidelines as well as the different assessment criteria for this option in Task 1. Reference to exemplar or training materials produced by OCR available on the specification webpage will also be of great assistance. Certainly it should be noted that only re-creative writing is permissible in this task: text transformation and “spring-boarding” are not; and it is generally felt that changes of narrative perspective tend to move away from closely focused re-creative work unless the studied text is polyphonic in nature, for example *The Bell* by Iris Murdoch.

Characters used in the re-creative writing must be present in the original text, not inventions. Inserts (providing additional scenes earlier or later) are popular task choices. Texts with streams of consciousness as a technique often enable candidates to develop the inner monologue of a character further. The voice, mood, atmosphere, setting, era, vocabulary used in the re-creative must re-create the world of the text.

This session most candidates who had chosen to write a re-creative piece were able to recognise and use the stylistic characteristics and thematic concerns of the original text with success, although it is advised that the accompanying critical commentary fully explains how the focus passage is connected with the re-creative piece. The focus passage should be included with the folder and should clearly be connected to the candidate’s re-creative writing as a source of inspiration or thematic continuation, not just as the point of entry. It is difficult to tell sometimes which passage inspired the re-creative work and then to assess how far the whole text has been cross-referenced. These concerns can be met by the careful selection of a passage from the base text to be included with the submission; in this respect, as so many others, Re-creative Writing shows its similarity to the Critical Piece alternative.

The accompanying commentaries should be critical in focus, evoking and referencing the use of language, form, structure of the original writing and demonstrating how the re-creative piece echoes the text with precise close analysis, not just straightforward description. The use of quotations to support points (AO2) is essential. Bullet points in the task set may help to focus the task more explicitly on the AOs.

## Task 2

The majority of submissions showed skilful text selections: there remained a strong interest in perspectives of the First World War with the use of novels such as *Birdsong* and *Regeneration* alongside the drama *Journey's End*; the study of Gothic literature was still strong – *The Woman in Black* and *The Wasp Factory* were popular. Certain texts appeared frequently (*The History Boys*, *The World's Wife*, later McEwan novels, *The Great Gatsby*), but new texts featured as well, such as *The Help* and *Jerusalem*, and interesting revivals of interest took place with some established British writers (Rattigan, Jean Rhys, Lawrence and Katherine Mansfield). American Literature was strongly represented.

## AO1

This Assessment Objective is the one most likely to be over-marked during internal moderation by some of the centres as the quality of written communication is not adequately taken into account when placing folders on 40 marks. Using an appropriate register is essential for high-ranking candidates, as is careful proof reading. Many folders nominally on a mark of 40 have basic lapses in the use of written English and/or lack an evident structure or are predictably, even woodenly, linear and/or use an inappropriate register; some even lack paragraphs and punctuation.

The organization of the ideas and the structure of the argument are expected to have a sharper, more fluent focus at the higher end of the mark range. Detailed knowledge of all three texts is also a crucial factor as more sustained coverage (and more balanced discussion of both texts in Task 2) sets apart the accomplished, high achieving responses.

The candidates' own use of language affects the AO1 mark in both tasks. The precise use of meta-language is to be encouraged rather than vague terms which may have some currency in oral discussion in the classroom but which do not articulate methods and effects with any precision on paper. Such slack expressions include the term "imageries", loosely applied to phrases that are not figurative but visual; the word "vibe" as a substitute for "atmosphere"; and the colloquial "flow" sometimes used to make a general point about aural effects or rhythm, but lacking any academic value.

Sometimes the problem is candidate misunderstanding. For instance, some candidates wrote of verses or stanzas as "paragraphs" and elegy was muddled with eulogy. Generally more discrimination is advised when discussing verse forms. The poet is not necessarily the voice or persona in the poem – awareness of this is often a discriminating feature of competent/good understanding. Sometimes form is recognised but put in the essay as a given rather than something to explore, for example the sonnet. Being able to discuss the differences between mood and atmosphere (rather than the colloquial word "feeling") is another distinguishing indicator of confident, polished analysis.

As a general rule, assured answers wrestle with ambivalent language and do so by avoiding ambiguous expression. However, attending to the mechanics of an argument can pay dividends. The use of discourse markers is recommended to begin topic paragraphs. Structured essays tend to develop more balanced and fluid comparison. Introductions and conclusions are crucial tools to give essays impact; sometimes they are just used to nest the discussion or round off in a repetitive way, which are somewhat wasted opportunities.

It is a very small quibble but it is important not to abbreviate text titles. Texts should also be honoured by italics or inverted commas depending on whether or not they are book-length works.

## AO2

This Assessment Objective is not always present even in supposedly mid-range folders and can be overlooked in character/plot driven essays. However, it is the dominant Assessment Objective for Task 1. Many Centres are well schooled in close passage study and re-creative writing with accompanying commentary. Critical terminology for close analysis is certainly in evidence in folders at the higher end of the range and appreciation of dramatic, narrative and poetical methods is necessary for determining above all the relationship between the reader/audience and their filtered or skewed perception of the happenings in the texts; or, put another way, how the writer controls our perceptions. However, as soon as candidates start discussing characters as real people, the literary illusion lapses. Sometimes in weaker responses there tend to be rather isolated strands of close analysis of language, form and structure as if addressing AO2 in a paragraph is enough before getting down to the real business of discussing character and themes. Such an approach is obviously to be avoided if the work is awarded a mark in Bands 4 and 5.

## AO3

This Assessment Objective has two aspects, both of which must be considered. The first strand of this Assessment Objective is comparison which, of course, should be the organising principle of Task 2, the Linked Texts essay.

This session there was generally more confident comparison achieved, though more centres could take advantage of the use of discourse markers. The sophistication of linking and method of structuring comparison are rewarded as aspects of AO1 too. With a greater range of text choices attempted, moderators saw some interesting groupings of texts and had a sense that comparison was strong this year; nevertheless the degree to which the comparative analysis was fluid or balanced between the texts varied. At the lower end of the range, some candidates found it challenging to sustain well-ordered, comparative responses.

The second aspect of AO3 is the use of alternative views or different readings. These should be present for mid-range responses and engaged with for higher mark-earning answers. It is advised that both texts discussed for Linked Texts receive attention in this area, and that critical assertions about each text are integrated into the argument and their implications are explored by the candidate. Some centres present readings of the topic (eg war) rather than the texts and this can be more difficult for candidates to integrate and still remain focussed on literary concerns. The readings presented need to be specific and directed so that the underlying position or viewpoint can be teased out and its applicability to the question explored.

Year 12 students can encounter difficulties when told to ensure that critical readings are embedded into an argument and a classroom approach may be to photocopy a couple of critical extracts to evaluate in class discussion alongside the text itself. However, many centres have moved pupils to successful strategies for researching texts and evaluating critical opinions. The better answers are not to be pinned down too heavily by one interpretation but able to explore various suggestions and the best submissions reveal the candidates exploring the centrality of critical readings of their texts or how far a particular position taken on a text confirms or refutes the general proposition of their argument in an independent and informed manner.

In the majority of cases, there was an impressive degree of alternative readings and effective use of footnotes and bibliographies. The use of footnotes to acknowledge specific named critics is recommended as a means of encouraging candidates to address this aspect of AO3 with precision. Centres may need to bear in mind that there should always be an evaluative element to the consideration of alternative interpretations and it is not an invitation for speculation. Frameworks as the springboard for an argument (Feminist, Marxist, Historical, Archetypal, Cultural Materialism, Post-Colonial etc) or as a means of linking the texts in Task 2 are a very useful strategy, but should be supported by reference to a critical text.

## **AO4**

The address of this Assessment Objective is found to be problematic in some centre submissions. It should be remembered that AO4 represents 10 marks out of the 25 available for Linked Texts essays. There is often some contextual consideration of significance but candidate arguments perhaps do not explore the significance of the contexts deeply enough, or focus on only one contextual concern and not others. Another concern here can be too much history being supplied and not enough focus on literary matters. Although this is not a widespread problem, some candidates are over-reliant on biographical information, which can deviate from literary engagement, often offloading this in great chunks towards the start of the essay. What is introduced to the essay in terms of context should be concise and serve an argument not pave the way for a point after filling in the picture of background matters. In this respect, tasks that do not focus on literary study but move off in a sociological or cultural direction or an over emphasis on theme (love or war, for example) should be avoided; or if they exist, then candidates need directing as to how meaning is conveyed by the writer or created by the reader's engagement with the writer's choices. Tasks that require a response to a character-based focus can also distract attention from a sustained discussion of contexts, because the candidates write generally in the approximate area, but not utilising specific material appertaining to that text or that particular writer.

## **Administration**

In most instances, the assessment of the folders had been rigorously conducted by Centres and the annotations and comments were very helpful. However, it is important that all centres fill in the summative comment on the cover sheet. The cover sheet is the opportunity for centres to represent their objective view of the candidates' work formally on the candidates' work for the audience of the external moderator. There was evidence of some Centres not realising the purpose and importance of the summative comment, nor the objectivity of the moderation process. Feedback to candidates should be positive and encouraging, but feedback for the moderator should use appropriate terms, from the Assessment Criteria, which match the marks awarded. In many cases where the Centres were over generous, the annotations said "good" or indicated some lapses in the work but then the work was given a high Band 5 mark. Similarly, if marks are changed due to internal moderation, there should be a comment indicating some rationale for the change. Word counts without quotations are required for each essay. Should a candidate write overlength, centres should indicate clearly where the 3000 word limit has been reached, and teachers should base their assessment only on the first 3000 words.

Much of the work and practice seen in June 2012 was excellent and the work seen continues to develop and grow. It is clear that many centres are now aware of expectations and able to hold the assessment scale securely in mind when deciding on marks. However, this security has not led to complacency as centres continue to experiment (there has been a rise in centres offering both Close Passage Study and Re-creative Work) and adjust their text selections for different cohorts to facilitate freshness and ownership.

## F663 Poetry and Drama pre-1800

### General Comments

This summer's examination produced some excellent work: the vast majority of scripts were very well-focused on the chosen tasks and clearly expressed. Very little writing was either muddled or incoherent, and the level of preparation for the examination overall was impressive.

Most pleasing was the improvement in reference to and analysis of the texts (AO2). It was felt that candidates knew their set texts well and at the higher end, the level of detail in the form of close reference to the texts and use of quotation was very impressive. Some centres had focused on looking at different interpretations of plays through various performances, which worked well for AO3, but meant that candidates towards the bottom end of the mark ranges tended to write about what they had seen on screen or at the theatre, with little close reference to the language of the texts. There is still room for work on preparing candidates to talk about the ways in which effects are produced in detail: sense of register, of idiom, and of tone. However, there was much sophisticated and illuminating close analysis to be found throughout the entry.

With respect to AO3, almost all candidates understood the need to consider different interpretations of their set texts. Although there is no requirement to do so, many candidates were able to name a range of well-known critics and engage with their debates, which worked very well and was pleasing to see in work produced under exam conditions. Nevertheless, some fell into the trap of listing others' views and not injecting their own analysis. One examiner wrote that 'Many students made use of a wealth of secondary critical material they had memorised and used this to good effect along with a good amount of text from the play – it was, generally, quoted and analysed well. But some candidates seem to learn off swathes of critics by heart rather than the texts. The result can be an anthology of critical opinion, which it is sometimes obvious that the candidates do not fully understand, and they lack the ability to develop their own opinions because they have spent time learning critics rather than the writers. Perhaps an active focus in teaching on discovering critics rather than being given a list of critical quotes to learn would be beneficial, as the same half-dozen critical quotations come up time and again'.

In Section B, comparisons ranged from straightforward to highly detailed and sophisticated.

Candidates seemed to have been trained well to include relevant contexts (AO4) particularly in Section B. Socio-historical and literary contexts often worked very well, but as is often the case, biographical contexts tended to be applied less well.

### Responses to Individual Questions

#### Section A: Shakespeare

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

- (a) **It is crucial to the play's effects that we are never allowed to be sure what we feel about the Prince.'**

Though some candidates perhaps wished that the question had been 'trace the development of Prince Hal in the course of the play', the most useful prompt for perceptive answers here was 'we are never allowed to be sure' – do we vacillate in our view of Hal, and, if so, is it deliberate on the part of Shakespeare? As soon as candidates started to analyse the actual question they opened up rich seams of enquiry. Some answers thought that Shakespeare ensures that we feel very sure

about what we should feel, which is a mixture of different kinds of emotion (eg admiration for Hal's independent clear-mindedness yet regret that he should so consciously be using the tavern fraternity). On the other hand, there were others who, just as validly, felt that uncertainty in our response to Hal was a calculated effect (note the prompt in the question 'we are never allowed') – which mirrored the wider political, moral and military uncertainties seen in the play.

**(b) 'In this play, cynicism triumphs.'**

A less popular question, but it elicited some interesting and well-focused responses, showing an awareness of this play within the history cycle and a real engagement with the changing character of Prince Hal and his changing relationship with Falstaff.

**2 Twelfth Night**

**(a) 'The sexual and social ambiguities of Viola's adopted identity are crucial to the effects of the play.'**

This question was often done well, with the temptation to provide no more than a character sketch almost always avoided. The question's focus on ambiguity helped candidates to explore Viola's place among the characters in Illyria. The nature of disguise was well analysed with some good attention paid to concepts such as the carnivalesque and with useful discussion of the layering of gender identity that occurs when male actors play female characters disguised as male courtiers. Most responses focused on the 'sexual' element of the question to the exclusion of the 'social'. However, some identified Viola's kinship with Feste, inasmuch as both characters are presented as outsiders to the madly irresponsible world of Illyria – yet one is eventually absorbed into it, while the other departs at the end. Critical opinion cited was mainly feminist and revolved around the position of women in the Renaissance and the voice Viola was allowed to adopt, dressed as a man. All in all this question was handled very well.

**(b) "delusion and excess are everywhere: the play is preoccupied with madness.'**

This was well answered on the whole. Candidates explored the types of madness and excessive emotions (and drink), from love to insanity and focused on the thematic development in the AO4 context of Twelfth Night festivities and the commentary of Feste on the play's events. Some saw the opening excess and delusion of Orsino as setting the tone. Some answers looked at Malvolio, at Sir Toby's self-delusion and his excess and Sir Andrew's role as a booby knight. Others discussed Olivia's over-the-top mourning. The very best answers put the idea of excess into its ethical place as the source of sin, instability [social and personal], possible insanity and certain mockery. They saw that the question is not "Is there madness in the play" but "Is the play *preoccupied* with madness". Delusion, excess, madness: are they the same? Does one imply the others? Those prepared to distinguish between the three produced some very cogent answers: some of the madness may be caused by self-delusion (Malvolio) but some is down to the infatuation of love (Orsino) or lack of self-knowledge (Aguecheek) or being mad for a living (Feste).

### 3 *Othello*

#### (a) **‘For a hero, Othello is too easy to pity, too hard to like.’**

This was much the most popular question. Answers were often well done, with the concept of heroism being effectively explored in relation to the rest of the play. Some answers were enormously varied and nuanced in their discussion of our responses to *Othello*, often showing an astute grasp of the way Shakespeare shapes our responses dramaturgically. Higher band responses recognised the word ‘hero’ and considered Aristotle’s theories on tragedy, of which Shakespeare was probably unaware. This worked to help them with discussion of what a hero might be. The strongest answers recognised how important was the humble determiner ‘too’: they recognised that it was right and proper to pity a hero, but that it should not be too easy to do so as a tragic hero. Many candidates gave intelligent AO3/AO4 arguments about the racial issues within the play and how contextually this would alter the audience’s perception. Some perceptive answers considered how directors could sway the audience’s perception regardless of the author’s original intentions, supported by firsthand experience of performance. Confident essays commented on *Othello*’s tendency to ‘self-exoticism’ as a means of winning over the Venetian senate, which develops into a more tragic sense of his own irreducible ‘otherness’. *Othello*’s final speeches were often perceptively discussed, provoking interestingly different views as to how we respond as an audience to him at this culminating point – are they yet another example of his tendency to retreat into self-dramatisation? What do they signify in relation to his sense of his own difference? Or do they actually suggest that he has gained some kind of tragic anagnorisis?

Many answers followed a clear but more predictable path through the text, arguing that *Othello* is made likeable and pitiable in the opening half of the play through the racist imagery used about him by Iago, but then becomes less so as he degenerates under Iago’s manipulation. What such responses omitted to consider was the key role of the prompt word ‘too’ in the question, pointing us towards something unresolved and unstable in our responses to him.

Critics were well used, with Leavis and Bradley often being used dialectically to push forward the argument. Coleridge’s ‘motiveless malignity’ cropped up less often. AO2 detail is crucial in Section A and some of the answers were stunning in the range and fluency of their referencing.

#### (b) **‘from beginning to end, the play is driven by stories and storytelling.’**

This question was attempted by far fewer candidates but was often done well. It had the advantage of inviting candidates to explore the texts in unexpected and unfamiliar ways. ‘Stories and Storytelling’ did require some careful definition; the best answers identified several distinct kinds of storytelling, produced by a range of different psychological motivations, and a range of dramatic effects. The idea of storytelling as a compulsive response to the inexplicability of events engineered by Iago’s masterfully malign narrative skills, was common in very good answers.

At times, the definition of what exactly a story is was pushed to breaking point, to include anything that a character says. But often the question was used to drill down in to the way *Othello* establishes his authority as soldier and lover in Venice and also the methods used by Iago to subvert that authority: ‘Stories make *Othello*, but they also unmake him’, as one candidate put it. Again precise and well focused responses used the quotation to steer them through. If candidates allowed the word ‘driven’ to guide them it produced some excellent answers with a clear focus on the drama of the play.

#### 4 *The Winter's Tale*

- (a) **'Between them, Hermione and Perdita successfully reconcile the play's divided worlds.'**

Candidates wrote perceptively about Perdita and Hermione. Essays ranged throughout the symbolic patterns within the play, looking closely at Leontes in the opening scene and closely exploring the tragi-comic elements of the play, before considering the world of Bohemia and the final reconciliation. Less secure answers tended to omit, for some reason, the redemptive aspects of the Hermione's 'statue' coming to life, focusing more on the emotional relationships rather than the more profound themes of death and regrowth. Many essays tended to focus more on Hermione than Perdita. Some very confident answers took issue with the question's whole contention, either by differentiating between them (Hermione is a great reconciler but Perdita merely a pretty face) or by arguing Paulina is a far more important agent of reconciliation. Others felt that whatever reconciliation we find at the end of the play, it is far from "successful", some very messy loose ends indeed being left when the curtain finally falls.

- (b) **'the world of the Shepherds and of Autolycus provides far more than light relief; it is an essential element of the play'.**

A question attempted by few candidates, but often done wonderfully well, with the pastoral world of Bohemia being considered as a source of redemptive energy within the text. A few perceptively explored the Shepherds as a representation of uninhibited sexuality. Others picked out subtle verbal parallelisms and contrasts between the opening scenes in Sicilia and the world of Autolycus. It was argued that even this pastoral world is seeded with darkness, as indicated by the duplicity, criminality and disguise that characterises it. The famous stage direction 'Exit, pursued by a bear' was closely considered as a hinge or cusp between the different worlds, involving both the acknowledgement of death and the necessity of laughter.

### Section B

#### *General*

Again the best candidates handled Section B very well indeed, often gaining higher marks than the more 'straightforward' Section A. As always the careful dovetailing of original and thoughtful comparisons was often remarkable and ingenious. This year we noted an improvement in the neat and seamless use of AO4. Higher Band responses gave close consideration to the subtleties of the quotations, but, pleasingly, there seemed to be more emphasis across the board on the quotation than previously and less of an inclination to seize on the more general prompt. There were some excellent responses where the quotation had taken the candidates' thought processes down surprising and refreshing avenues. Critical opinion again was well used. In addition there was a substantial amount of comment on the plays in performance, increasingly matching the attention given to performance in the Shakespeare questions. This gave an excellent source of (AO3) dramatic interpretation and informed some very intelligent arguments.

## Responses to Individual Questions

### 5 'People will do anything, no matter how foolish, to get what they want.'

#### *Chaucer and Marlowe*

'The Renaissance audience, used to anthropocentrism, may have sympathised with Faustus' ambition more than Chaucer's audience with the Pardoner or the rioters'. Wanting to kill death was a favourite example of ambition in *The Pardoner's Tale*.

This pairing worked extremely well. The Pardoner's apparent blindness towards the consequences of his hypocrisy was well noted, most answers making good use of the rioters' tale (thus effectively having three points of comparison) but some not addressing this at all.

#### *Marlowe and Milton*

'Faustus' ambition springs from greed and boredom and so is essentially foolish. Satan is not foolish but measured, clear and charismatic. But both Faustus and Satan exemplify ambition so strong that it destroys'. Historical and biographical contexts were often quite well used here. Satan's ambition was compared both to Cromwell's and to Milton's; Faustus' daring was related to Marlowe's in creating him or to a wider Renaissance interest in individuality.

#### *Webster and Donne*

Wide ranging answers were seen on the Duchess, many discussing her headstrong marriage and the fact that she must have anticipated the consequences. There was some sustained argument about Ferdinand and the Cardinal and themes of incest and greed were linked to ambition. Bosola was generally viewed favourably, essays often seeing his responsibility and finding him more moral by contrast with other characters. Many candidates cited actual performances, and were aware of play genre and staging effects. Views of Donne were less developed, many confining his ambition to sexual conquest. Some biographical information was offered about Donne's success as a clergyman.

### 6 'Sins and vices demand punishment. Sinners expect it; readers and audiences demand it!'

Better answers addressed the 'audiences expect it', examining context and genre to establish 'audience', especially Chaucer as a 'performance poet'.

#### *Chaucer and Webster:*

One essay argued convincingly that the audience or reader is unsure what to demand given the moral ambiguity of the Pardoner and Bosola: the sinful Pardoner's ability to tell a moral tale and Bosola's role as the Duchess's persecutor and avenger. 'Both have the potential to right wrongs'.

#### *Milton and Marlowe*

The argument often centred on whether we see Faustus and Satan as sinners or as admirable figures, with more discerning answers taking into account the characters' own 'expectations'. Sometimes they were seen as attempting to conceal their sinfulness from themselves and others – Satan more successfully than Faustus.

#### *Donne and Webster*

'The Duchess and the speaker of Donne's poems do not see love as a sin'. Another view was that the Duchess and some of Donne's women are punished 'because they are women rather than because they are sinners'; examples included the way the Duchess is characterized by the Aragonian brethren and the way the woman is characterized in 'A Jet Ring Sent'. Contextual material on the position of women was well integrated into the argument by many of these candidates. A broader but interesting contextual and comparative point was that '...in the intimate context of Donne's poems punishment is less often expected than in the public context of Webster's play'.

**7 'Strong emotions demand intense and vivid expression.'**

*Donne and Webster*

Facility with quotations from drama texts often was excellently embedded at least as well as is expected in Part A. The unevenness of Faustus was established with strong focus on his final speech, as was the rhetoric of Satan being all he has as armour to overcome his dire physical position. The rioters' ridiculous attempt to slay Death and the contrast between their language and the Old Man's courtesy were well noted, as were the Pardoner's flights of passionate sermonising and denunciation of sin.

*Donne and Webster:* candidates usually found good examples of hyperbolic expressions of love and of emotion at separation, for instance when the Duchess and Antonio are parting and in 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning'. There were also some effective comparisons between the expression of Ferdinand's desire for revenge and the feelings of the speaker of 'The Funeral'.

**8 'We are little battlefields: in us, reason and emotion are constantly at war.'**

*Marlowe and Milton:* 'the "reason" both Faustus and Satan know is that God is almighty'. Another good answer argued that where Faustus struggles – the conflict is shown in the good and bad Angels – 'Satan lacks reason and is entirely driven by the emotion of revenge'. The tension between what Faustus and Satan say, how they act and what they actually know was well developed.

*Chaucer*

References to *The Pardoner's Tale* tended to ignore the fact that the conflict between reason and emotion is external – he is himself fully aware of and shameless about the disparity between his function and his actions. Here, AO4 could become too dominant, with lengthy historical accounts of contemporary corruption.

*Donne and Webster*

Some very interesting answers contrasted the passionate younger Donne of the romantic poems to the hot-headed characters of the play and the older, wiser poet of the Holy Sonnets with the stoical Duchess. In terms of the choice made of Donne's poems, 'The Flea' was somewhat overrepresented, sometimes to the exclusion of all else.

**9 'The skull lies only a very little way beneath the skin'**

*Donne and Webster*

A number of answers looked interestingly at immortality as well as mortality: the Duchess' presence in Act Five and the lovers' continuance in 'The Relic'. Donne was felt, however, on the evidence of 'Death be not proud ...', to be more certain about the afterlife than Webster.

Stronger answers made skilful use of Donne's Second Anniversary as context. The Duchess' belief that the next world will be perfect was addressed.

*Chaucer*

The rioters' tale was also highly successful here, together with the personification of Death in the shape of the Old Man. Again, remarkably good close textual references for a 'closed book' examination were often seen.

**10 'Mockery makes us wiser.'**

*Pope and Sheridan*

On the whole, only stronger candidates managed to master the subtlety of satire and as a result there was much discussion of language issues such as zeugma in Pope and names in Sheridan.

## F664 Texts in Time

As the new specification reaches maturity, this was a very successful session, with large numbers of candidates writing thoughtful, developed essays on a very wide range of different texts. That range means that the job of a coursework moderator is a fascinating and rewarding one. As the unit has settled, though, Centres entering their candidates for coursework seem gradually to be polarising into one of two camps. On the one hand are those Centres who embrace the design of the unit as an individual research task and guide their candidates through their own enthusiasms and interests, which produces engaged and vigorous work. On the other are those Centres who choose to play safe and teach the same three texts, often with a limited range of questions. Candidates can write well in this approach, but when, as often happens, essays contain the same references, quotations and critical opinions, the uniformity demonstrates the lack of personal engagement in developing the argument.

### Administration

The issue of the word limit has been mentioned in every Report to Centres since the unit was first moderated. There is a clear section in the Coursework Guidelines on p. 22 about the word limit and how it should be treated. These guides are also clearly set out on the reverse of the coversheet. The word limit is 3000 words and the instructions on the rear of the cover sheet are unambiguous: 'no folder must be submitted which exceeds this length' is printed in bold type.

Moderators this session were obliged to return very many coursework essays which flouted this regulation, a process which necessarily caused delays in the moderation process and upset for teachers and candidates. This is a serious matter; while some teachers may view a candidate's contravention of the limit as 'not significant', as was written on a number of essays in one Centre, it is the equivalent of another Centre allowing candidates an extra five or ten minutes in the exam. Both are clear contraventions of the regulations of the specification. A clear word count, with and without quotations, should be appended to every essay, and no essay should be submitted where the latter figure is greater than 3000.

Nearly every Centre included the Centre Authentication Form (CCS160) with its submission and the use of footnotes and bibliographies is now generally good. These too are requirements of the specification and work should not be submitted without them.

### Texts

One of the pleasures of coursework is the range of texts which are discussed and it is heartening to read highly sophisticated writing on stalwarts of the canon such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Marvell and Dickens alongside contemporary names such as Adichie, Bean, McCarthy and Nagra. World literatures written in English occurred quite frequently in submissions, particularly African and Indian writing, while American literature is very well represented. The plays of Ibsen remain the favourite where literature in translation makes an appearance, but some candidates have gone further.

The freedom of choice which coursework provides allows candidates to write on literature for which they have a particular enthusiasm. This has allowed some surprising choices to work extremely well – for a couple of years, for example, there have been examples of very sophisticated writing on *The Wind in the Willows*. Some Centres direct candidates towards texts that are appropriate for particular ability levels, which is a good idea but needs caution. There were some examples in this session of candidates choosing texts which did not allow them to address the Assessment Objectives at a standard appropriate for A level. It needs a sophisticated, genre-aware approach to make the *Twilight* novels, the work of Jacqueline Wilson, AA Milne or Malorie Blackman appropriate for A2 level study.

Though the specification has reached maturity, and though poetry is one of the compulsory genres to be discussed in F664, the handling of verse often remains the weakest part of coursework essays. Frequently it is the text which fits least well into the group of three chosen, an awkward interloper into the question, with the result that it often figures that way in the essays. To overcome this trait, Centres and candidates might consider starting with the poetry text and its concerns, then finding two other texts that fit with it. The most successful answers keep the poetry equal in the argument with the other texts, and crucially, they discuss the poetry as verse, with a full recognition of the particular features of the genre. They quote it properly, in its lines, and discuss how its ideas are treated using structure, imagery and language choices. Much less successful are those essays which only consider the content of poems, sometimes coupled with the biography of the poet, as if all poetry is by nature autobiographical. It is also worth repeating the reminder that the poetry text should be the approximate equivalent in substance as that set for an examined unit, and that candidates need to show their understanding of that text – the collection of poems – to address AO1 successfully.

## The Assessment Objectives

### AO3

Work at the top of the mark range showed a sophisticated grasp of comparison, developing argument which moved fluidly between the three texts under discussion and combining developed, argued comparisons with quick observations of detail. The strongest comparisons are firmly focused on what each writer is doing, how they treat the issue in focus, considering that they are writing poetry, or prose, or drama. Answers which compare the issue itself as it features in the texts, rather than its presentation, do much less well, and plot and character driven essays are less successful for the same reasons, though they are frequently overmarked. Questions which direct the candidate not only to comparison, but to a purpose for that comparison, encouraging evaluation and argument, tend to be very helpful in eliciting strong, well-directed responses.

It would seem that candidates throughout the mark range were well-prepared for comparison, as most tended to integrate their texts in the discussion, with very few separate and sequential examinations of the texts.

As the marking criteria indicate, the strongest answers offer a 'well-informed and effective exploration of different readings'. Some candidates do this extremely well, reading widely in books and academic journals as well as reputable websites; they engage thoughtfully with the views they discover, considering the implications of the reading for the text and showing how that exploration has modified their own thinking. Less successful are those candidates who accept critical views at face value and use them supportively, rather than test their thesis against them. At the other end of the scale, there are examples of quick references to limited sources, such as Amazon reviews of little substance. There has also been an increase in the use of 'soundbite readings' – reliance on pithy statements without engaging with the argument behind those statements. This inevitably limits the amount of exploration, but is often credited with 'AO3' and a tick in the margin without acknowledgement of its limitations. This problem is exacerbated when all candidates in the Centre use the same quotations without further engagement, suggesting that they have been provided with the quotations, but have not read and considered their sources. Some candidates are also relying on quotation generating websites, such as *quotegarden* and *brainyquote*, which means quotations lack source, context or, sometimes, relevance.

With some excellent websites and years of academic publishing, there is plenty of critical material on canonical texts, of which some candidates have made excellent use. Candidates have found different ways of solving the problem of exploring the critical debate around contemporary texts by referring to film versions, readings, newspaper reviews and theatre trips, as well as recognised literary critical sources where available.

#### **AO4**

Many essays demonstrated confident and illuminating knowledge of relevant contexts, whether, literary, historical, political or cultural. The discussion of context was at its best when carefully researched and relevant to both text and task. The key words in the marking criteria are ‘significance and influence’; where these terms were understood and applied, the use of contextual material was excellent. It often featured in, but was not confined to, the opening of the essay; details were then picked up and examined in the course of the argument to illuminate or develop key points. Moderators saw good thoughtful work which included relevant discussion of immigration in post-war Britain, Jungian archetypes, Christian iconography, performance histories, WWI propaganda and Blake’s engravings – the range can be broad and sometimes it clearly reflected a candidate’s personal interests or their other avenues of study.

Knowledge of the contexts does have to be secure; sometimes candidates were guilty of making simplistic assumptions which more careful research would have avoided. At times, candidates’ understanding of the influence of these contexts was questionable. This was especially the case with social and historical contexts. At other times the concern with socio-historical matters was so developed that it dominated the essay, the texts serving to illustrate the socio-historical thesis, rather than the historical issues being used to illuminate the texts. Biographical context often proved a dangerous trap as candidates seemed determined to make the text fit the life of the writer, leading the writer rather than the writing to be at the focus of the essay.

#### **AO1**

Candidates produced the most coherent writing when arguing a case, structuring the response and using the other AOs to inform the argument. It was more difficult to find ‘coherent and detailed argument’ in discursive or illustrative essays, particularly those which dwelt on plot and character, which were less able to demonstrate understanding of the texts as literary constructs.

While most essays are well structured and well written, a number of arguments are flawed not because of their ideas, but because of their poor expression. Because of the extended time available to complete and redraft coursework, a high standard of expression, register and fluency is expected in the top mark bands. A number of candidates had been awarded marks in band 5 for AO1/2 who showed many lapses in grammatical accuracy, phrasing and paragraphing which seemed to have been overlooked by markers.

#### **AO2**

The strongest essays have analysis of language, form and structure clearly in the foreground as they compare writers’ treatment of an idea or issue in their three texts. Questions which ask for comparison of presentation, treatment, portrayal or similar facilitate this approach. Some penetrating discussions showed subtle awareness of the ways in which different genres involve the reader or audience and explored nuances through deft analysis. On the whole, candidates showed a good ability to discuss diction and imagery, but there is still much less successful exploration of form and structure. It is often ignored altogether in prose with only rudimentary comments in poetry, where it usually has significant effects. It is particularly disappointing to see how many candidates demonstrate their complete insensitivity to poetic form, converting verse in to prose when they quote. Moderators did see, though, some excellent discussion of form and structure on occasion, sometimes facilitated by the increasing use of a drama text as the third option. Where careful consideration is given to dialogue, movement, proxemics, setting, costume, lighting, etc, discussion of drama was sharp and effective. It was a shame when these elements were ignored and plays were discussed as if they were novels, with little awareness of stagecraft.

## **Marking and Annotation**

There were signs this session of a number of Centres pushing upwards with the marks; frequently one or two marks had been added to the whole cohort during internal moderation without any indication of the reasons for the changes. Usually, the initial marks were more accurate and adjustments have followed. In particular, the marking criteria in band 5 need careful examination, and Centres generally need to exercise greater discrimination above 36.

Moderators did see, however, good practice in the overwhelming number of Centres. In these, detailed, accurate marginal annotation and summative comments highlighted the strengths and relative weaknesses in the essays of individual candidates. Both types of comment are of enormous help in the moderation process, giving the moderator confidence that markers in the Centre are guided by a thorough understanding of the AOs and genuinely evaluate the attainment of their candidates. Such marking is usually accurate, discriminating between candidates conscientiously and meticulously.

It is much less helpful when Centres' marginal annotations identify instances where a particular AO has been met without evaluating the quality of the evidence. Similarly, summative comments which exaggerate the strengths of the work and rarely acknowledge any specific failings are often the hallmarks of generous marking.

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