GCE

English Language and Literature

Advanced GCE **H474**

OCR Report to Centres June 2017

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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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

About this Examiner Report to Centres
This report on the 2017 Summer assessments aims to highlight:
- areas where students were more successful
- main areas where students may need additional support and some reflection
- points of advice 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.
The report also includes:
- **Guidance on how to put your results in context** – using the outcomes of Cambridge Assessment's research that indicates that volatility in schools' GCSE exam results is normal, quantifiable and predictable

- Links to important documents such as **grade boundaries**

- A reminder of our **post-results services** including Enquiries About Results

- **Further support that you can expect from OCR**, such as our Active Results service and CPD programme

- A link to our handy Teacher Guide on **Supporting the move to linear assessment** to support you with the ongoing transition

Putting your results in context

If you've had results this year that you weren't expecting then the latest research from Cambridge Assessment may help to explain why. You may be surprised to learn that volatility in schools' GCSE exam results is normal, quantifiable and predictable.

Researchers from Cambridge Assessment argue in a report, Volatility happens: Understanding variation in schools' GCSE results (April 2017), that fluctuations are to be expected and can be largely explained by a change in the students or even just simple chance. They say that although it might be seen as obvious, in some years pupils will perform better than expected, while in other years pupils will perform worse.

The study will enable you to manage expectations and have conversations with your heads and governors so that they can interpret changes in expected results appropriately. The research builds on an earlier study that ruled out exam grade boundaries and marking as major components of volatility. The current research adds an understanding of just how much volatility can be accounted for by the routine changes in students between years and normal variations in individual students' performance in a particular exam.

Be prepared for conversations about what's normal in terms of outcomes by reading our press release, researcher blog and by downloading this handy GCSE English and Maths fluctuation infographic.
Ofqual has also published a report looking at patterns of variability in outcomes of schools and colleges for particular GCSE subjects as one way of understanding the extent of volatility in the system.

Grade boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other assessments, can be found on Interchange.

Enquiry About Results

If any of your students' results are not as expected, you may wish to consider one of our Enquiry About Results services.
For full information about the options available visit: http://ocr.org.uk/administration/stage-5-post-results-services/enquiries-about-results/

Supporting the move to linear assessment

This was the first year that students were assessed in a linear structure. To help you navigate the changes and to support you with areas of difficulty, download our helpful Teacher guide:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/341817-moving-from-modular-to-linear-qualifications-teachers-guide.pdf

Further support from OCR

Active Results offers a unique perspective on results data and greater opportunities to understand students' performance.
It allows you to:
- Review reports on the **performance of individual candidates**, cohorts of students and whole centres
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Advanced GCE English Language and Literature (H474)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

H474/01 Exploring non-fiction and spoken texts

Text A

Most candidates demonstrated relevant background knowledge of Text A in the first few words of their response, for example explaining that the speech was broadcast over radio, and that a wide range of listeners across the British Empire were already aware of the crisis. Most candidates also made knowledgeable comments on purpose in Text A, ranging from valid but broad (e.g. 'to inform and to persuade') to more detailed and insightful (e.g. 'to reassure the country that they will be in safe hands', 'to change the public's perception of him, from scandal to sympathy'). There were a few misunderstandings of aspects of context and audience, for example suggesting that Edward was speaking to a crowd in a shared physical space and/or that his speech was televised.

A small number of candidates brought detailed knowledge of the audio recording of the abdication speech, and explored its prosodic features from memory. Listening to the spoken texts in the Anthology is of course a valuable part of teaching and learning, but care should be taken as to how this knowledge is best deployed in the exam. A brief reference can help to demonstrate understanding of the significance of context and facilitate analysis of the ways meanings are shaped. For example, one candidate mentioned that Edward delivered his speech slowly and deliberately, before going on to analyse related aspects of lexis and syntax. However, it is important that the analytical points made are focused on and supported by reference to the text as it appears in the question paper. For example, a sequence of points made by one candidate about the words which Edward stressed and those he stumbled over was difficult to credit as highly as analysis of features that were evident in the printed text.

Text B

The majority of candidates struggled with Text B in some way. Most of the difficulties seemed to be caused by the need quickly to make sense of the text in relation to Text A. Many candidates assumed that the title of the film 'The King's Speech' referred directly to Edward's abdication speech. Of these, several made points exploring 'the stuttering prince and his loyal princess' as a reference to Edward and Mrs Simpson. Some asserted that Edward's paragraphs were short because he needed long pauses to overcome his speech impediment.

Other candidates were confused by the centrality of Churchill to a text which they expected to focus on Edward. A few assumed that Churchill must have been 'the Prime Minister' Edward referred to in Text A, and built points around this connection. Some misread the pronoun reference in 'he threw his political capital away in handfuls' as referring to Edward rather than Churchill. Very many made a similar mistake in quoting from the second paragraph, believing that 'his romantic attachment to this gargoyle' referred to Edward's love for Wallace, rather than Churchill's attachment to Edward.

All such misreadings were understandable, especially given the time constraints and the nature of Text B. None of these miscues was penalised: no candidate achieved a lower mark than they would have if they had omitted these points. However, these and other inaccuracies were recognised as attempted points rather than secure ones.

As far as possible, it is important for candidates not to make assumptions about the straightforwardness of the relationship between the texts. Although time is short, candidates may need to read the unseen text more than once before they begin to plan their response.

There is no stated requirement for candidates to write about the two texts equally. However, those who made many points about Text A and very few or none at all about Text B did achieve

a lower mark than those who divided a similar number and quality of points more evenly between the texts. In practice, candidates could not achieve a higher-level mark by writing well about only one of the texts; they needed to show some insight into both. Despite the inherent difficulties of Text B, unevenness in the attention paid to the two texts was a limiting factor in only a small number of responses.

- Introductions and conclusions

Most responses began with some kind of introductory overview, usually focusing on the context of both texts. Wherever these introductions said something of substance, they served a useful and efficient purpose. The most effective tended to be brief (2 - 4 sentences) and also interpretive; i.e. the candidate used their own words to foreground one or two contextual factors and/or assert one or two insights about each text. Some introductions were explicitly comparative. This also worked well; though, in practice, the level of comparison in the introduction was unrelated to the depth of comparative thought overall and as such had little impact on the eventual mark. Many responses began by pointing out that Text A was a spoken text and Text B written. This was perhaps less effective than the more interpretive openings, but nonetheless showed some application of concepts and seemed to help some candidates to get going.

Least effectively, a number of candidates used their introductory paragraph to copy out or paraphrase the information given in the question paper. For example:

> Text A is a spoken text of Edward VIII's speech announcing his abdication, following the constitutional crisis caused by his proposal to marry Wallis Simpson who was an American Divorcee. Text B on the other hand is a written text from an article by Christopher Hitchens criticising the portrayal of Edward VIII's abdication speech in 2010 film 'The King's Speech'.

Such introductions gained no credit. These candidates would have done better to go straight into their analysis without any sort of introduction.

Many candidates ended their response with a concluding paragraph. Almost without exception, these conclusions had no impact on the mark awarded. In almost every case, they consisted of little more than a detail-free summary of some of the points made earlier. For example:

> To conclude both texts use different language techniques to support and emphasise the points they make and the different contexts such as historical context have on the language used. These impact the purpose and its effect on the audience, as both were in some way persuasive texts their aim was to put forward a strong argument to validate their views. This was done with facts in text B and emotive language and direct address in text A.

The first sentence here is too generalised to gain credit. The more specific insights mentioned in the second and third sentences (that both texts were persuasive and put forward a strong argument, and the use of facts in Text B and emotive language and direct address in Text A) had all been explored earlier in the answer, and gained no credit for being repeated. In some responses, such conclusions comprised as much as one-third of the candidate's writing. In these cases, and perhaps in others too, the candidate would likely have received a higher mark if they had been advised not to write a conclusion of any sort.

- Connections and comparison (AO4)

For responses to gain credit for AO4, it needed to be clear which aspect of one text was being compared to which aspect of the other, and there needed to be a genuine connection between these two. Where candidates merely switched from one text to another with little or no real connection (for example, 'Whereas Text A uses repetition to create emphasis, Text B uses proper nouns'), they received little or no credit in relation to AO4. Where responses where characterised by connections which were tenuous rather than clear or strong, they were likely to be described by 'some attempt to explore connections' (Level 3). In order to access the higher levels of the mark scheme in relation to AO4, there needed to be genuinely comparative thinking. For some candidates, this was evident in the number of sound connections they made; for others, it was a result of the quality of the comparisons rather than the quantity, with a smaller number of connections made to shed light on both texts.

Many candidates made sound assertions comparing the level of craft in each text, and contrasting the wide audience of Text A with the narrower, niche audience of Text B. These connections were accurate and insightful; however, where they were made briefly and not explored through analysis, they gained only a little credit with respect to AO4. In some cases, the idea of purpose was used to generate comparisons so broad that they could not be recognised as connections at all. For example, the opening sentences of two consecutive paragraphs in one response were: 'Text A meets its purpose successfully of informing about his abdication ... // Text B is also able to meet its purpose of criticising the portrayal of the abdication…'

More successfully, some candidates explored the different ways Edward was presented in the two texts: e.g. as loyal and selfless in Text A, and disloyal and selfish in Text B; as a devoted husband-to-be in Text A, and as a 'playboy' in Text B. One candidate argued that the nature of history meant that Edward would forever be remembered as the criminal Hitchens exposes, rather than the victim he made himself out to be in Text A. Even where such connections were made in passing rather than as an organising principle for developed analysis, they tended to be effective in enhancing the meanings made overall.

Some candidates took a more systematic approach to comparison, making connections through different language levels, e.g. comparing first the whole-text structure, then sentence types, then lexis. This worked well for candidates who had very secure knowledge of language and were selective in the terms they applied and the points they made. It was a much less effective approach for those who were unresponsive to the particularities of the two texts. Very many candidates pointed out, for example, that both texts contained 'a semantic field of royalty' or 'a lexical set of politics', but were unable to develop this connection to good effect (e.g. 'This clearly tells the reader what the texts are about').

Some took a more flexible approach to comparing language use, for example exploring the way each text used simple sentences for impact after a complex sentence, or comparing the effects of the sentences beginning with conjunctions in each text. As with all connections, these varied in their effectiveness: they were used successfully by candidates who developed the connections through the analysis of the ways meanings were shaped in each text; they were used less successfully by candidates who failed to explore related meanings through analysis.

For achievement in relation to AO4 as described by Level 5, responses needed to demonstrate sustained exploration of connections through analysis of language. A number of responses did this successfully. Few candidates were able to explore connections in ways that were 'detailed' and 'excellent' (Level 6).

- Concepts, methods and terminology (AO1)

High achievement with regard to AO1 came in different forms. For some, it was apparent in the number and range of accurate, relevant linguistic terms used productively to generate insights from point to point. For others, it was more evident in the conceptual thinking behind the methods applied: for example, in the sustained exploration of register in each text – the mixed journalistic register of Text B, and the mixed formal and more personal, emotive register of Text A.

A few features in Text B were discussed by a large number of responses covering a wide range of marks, particularly the syndetic triadic list of adjectives 'so stupid and so selfish and so vain'. Few candidates found convincing ways to make a related connection with Text A; some did so only by misreading 'the ministers of the crown and ... Mr Baldwin, the Prime Minister' as a list of three. There was also a narrow range of observations about the language of Text A represented in the majority of responses. Many commented on Edward's use of direct address; more still commented on his use of first-person pronouns. Attempts to make this the focal point of a comparison were also often unsuccessful, with unconvincing claims made about Hitchens' use of the pronoun 'he'. Frameworks which leant themselves more easily to a comparative approach, such as discourse structure, were applied more or less effectively, and tended in some cases to produce descriptive rather than interpretive analysis.

Some lower-level responses struggled with the unhelpful idea of 'bias', arguing for example that Text A was more biased than Text B because Text B used third-person pronouns rather than first. A few higher-level responses suggested that Edward's heavy use of first-person pronouns was a deviation from conventional monarch's speeches, and suggested that the occasion demanded that he speak for himself rather than his people. Some also developed this to explore the contrasting effect of the pronouns at the end, particularly 'we now have a new king' and 'his people', arguing that these emphasised Edward's stepping down to become a member of the public. This kind of development of ideas through analysis and integration of contextual factors were typical features that distinguished higher-level responses. Lower-level responses, in contrast, tended to comment in more general and less developed ways on how first-person pronouns and direct address 'made the speech more personal'.

Many candidates deployed terms in a way that was best described as 'competent'. This was true where terminology was used accurately but not especially insightfully or productively. For example, some candidates spent time arguing that both texts contained declaratives, with little sensitivity to the neutrality of the declarative sentence mood. More often, 'competent' described an application of frameworks that was dominated by the repeated identification of word class which did little more than help to state the obvious. The descriptor 'competent' also applied where terms were 'mainly appropriate' rather than entirely accurate. Many candidates misused the term 'imperative', most commonly to refer to Edward's 'you must believe me' and 'I want you to know'. The term 'hyperbole' was used similarly loosely, in relation to both texts. In general, the less central the terminology was to the point being made, the more likely it was to be used inaccurately. In this way, many verbs were referred to as abstract nouns and vice versa (particularly in comments on 'without the help and support of the woman I love'), and many adjectives were labelled abstract nouns, etc. Where a response contained one or two such inaccuracies and they were unrepresentative of the response as a whole, they did not affect the mark. However, where such imprecision characterised an approach to the application of frameworks that was less than purposeful or secure, it tended to result in a lower-level mark.

Many candidates did apply concepts and use terminology in ways that were best described by the words 'secure' and 'appropriate' (Level 5). A small number were discriminating as well as sophisticated in their use of terminology, in ways that were best described by the words 'excellent' and 'apt' (Level 6).

- Understanding of the significance of contexts (AO3)

Most candidates found it easier to evidence their understanding of the influence of contextual factors for Text A than Text B. A few made unthinking references to Edward's effect on 'the reader', which tended to indicate a general lack of sensitivity to context. Many more integrated into their analysis illuminating references to the contexts of production and reception for the abdication speech, thinking sensitively about Edward's delivery of the piece over the radio, and the assumptions he made about his listeners' knowledge.

In order to access the higher levels of the mark scheme in relation to AO3, candidates needed to show 'clear and relevant' insight into Text B as well as Text A. Few candidates were explicitly sensitive to the idea of a browsing readership with a general interest in culture; most assumed that the intended audience had sought out a review of this particular film, perhaps coming to it via a search engine. Many, however, made valid comments about Hitchens' assumption of an educated and interested audience. Some went on to consider the ways Text B worked well both for those who had and those who hadn't seen the film. A few candidates discussed Hitchens' iconoclastic approach, arguing that he intentionally caused controversy in seeking to tear down the generally accepted image of Churchill as the great Briton who fought off Hitler. Such insights were typical of the responses described as showing a 'perceptive understanding of the significance of contexts' (Level 6).

- Analysis of ways meanings are shaped (AO2)

Responses which were rewarded highly in relation to AO2 were characterised by a combination of carefully selected quotation and apt use of the candidate's own words. Conversely, responses which gained little credit for AO2 tended to rely on very broad, generalised expressions (e.g. 'Text A and Text B both use language to support their points').

In some cases, generalised comments appeared to be part of an effort to directly answer the question: 'Compare the ways in which the speaker and writer … use language *to support and emphasise the points they make.*' Some candidates frequently repeated the words 'support', 'emphasise' and 'points' in the absence of (or in ways that prevented them from finding) their own words. In the Component 1 assessment, the question is intended to be neutral; it is the texts themselves that provide the specificity and the variety. From the first sentence they write, candidates should be encouraged to respond to the general terms of the question in ways that are lexically more specific; it may be best to avoid altogether using the words that appear in the question.

Successful analysis of the ways meanings are shaped depends on a balance between words from the text and the candidate's own words. Where those own words are lacking, or are displaced by the embedding of short quotations, it significantly limits the meanings made. For example:

> Both texts differ vastly, but there are some similarities present in the two texts. An example would be the utilisation of intensifiers, 'I have been treated with the greatest kindness'. The intensifier in this case being 'greatest', it aims to add more emphasis to the kindness Edward VIII received. 'In the end, Edward proved so stupid and so selfish and so vain', here the repetition of the intensifier 'so' emphasises how stupid, selfish and vain the writer perceived Edward VIII to be. Once again, his point is emphasised.

This passage illustrates several tendencies characteristic of lower-level responses: the difference between exploring connections and merely identifying similarities and differences; the limitations of deploying basic knowledge of word class (intensifiers) in order to state the obvious; the recycling of words from the question ('Once again, his point is emphasised'). Also striking is the candidate's reliance on words from the text ('the *kindness* Edward VIII received …. emphasises how *stupid, selfish* and *vain* the writer perceived Edward VIII to be').
Many candidates used a range of terms more accurately and productively than this, but also had few words for meanings, and instead made routine linkages with broad comments such as 'the

rule of three helps to support the points he is making' or 'the negative semantic field gives the text a negative tone'.

Candidates need to be helped away from very generalised expression and encouraged to make rich and specific meanings in their analysis, as may be seen in this excerpt from a higher-level response:

> The ending of Edward's speech generates a level of sympathy as he addresses the nation for the last time: 'I wish you happiness and prosperity with all my heart'. The pairing of abstract nouns, 'happiness and prosperity', creates a sincere and optimistic farewell, emphasised by his shift to core lexis in the familiar collocation 'with all my heart'. The appositional phrase 'his people' takes away all of his power and status with a simple noun phrase. His listeners are made fully aware that Edward is no longer king.

This is characteristic of the highest-scoring responses both in its concise integration of the AOs (expert knowledge of language, sensitivity to contextual factors, developed analysis of ways meanings are shaped) and in the effectiveness of the candidate's deployment of their own words ('a sincere and optimistic farewell', 'takes away all his power and status', 'is no longer king').

H474/02 The language of poetry and plays

General Comments:

In this first series of the new A level English Language and Literature specification, centres and candidates are to be congratulated on the preparation that has clearly gone into the examination. Candidates demonstrated a secure and often very thorough knowledge and understanding of the set texts, with the ability to use textual references from other poems in the collections and, where relevant, elsewhere in the play to good effect. The most popular poetry texts were Blake and Duffy and, in the drama, Shakespeare and Williams. There was some excellent work on other texts and centres are encouraged to consider other options for the forthcoming series. The humour and focus on contemporary issues in *Jerusalem* clearly appealed to the candidates who studied this text, whilst study of more traditional writers such as Heaney and Wilde led to excellent analysis. Examiners reported that an interest in current political issues clearly informed candidates' responses to Blake's views in *London,* showing how relevant the study of English Literature and Language is to their lives.

Some candidates have taken a strategic approach to hitting the assessment objectives, however, in less successful responses, the focus on these objectives can appear somewhat forced, for example where candidates feel they must mention them all in the introduction. Others are building a recipe to use with any question set and risk missing the focus of the question and genuinely engaging with the texts in the process. Lengthy introductions which deliver a large quantity of context and spend time elaborating on the areas which will be covered in the response and equally lengthy conclusions which re-affirm what has been explored take up a great deal of time for little reward. Candidates make better use of their time annotating the given poem/extract in relation to the focus of the question and making brief, effective plans, especially where connection to other poems in the collection is required. Many responses were very lengthy, showing candidates as determined to show all they know about the given poem and extract/play. Concise, analytical responses that demonstrate a genuine engagement with the ideas in the texts and the ways meanings are shaped are the most successful.

The requirements of AO1 and AO2 are linked together in the indicative content of the mark scheme and these are the dominant objectives in the assessment. AO1 refers to the application of "relevant concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate" and this is the same across all units of A level English Language and Literature. Literature candidates read literary texts using literary concepts and methods of analysis. Language candidates bring linguistic ideas such as pragmatics, discourse and phonology **and** approaches to texts which can include conversation and discourse analysis to their study of literary texts. However, it is important to judge which concepts and methods are most useful in relation to the text and the particular question.

 In responding to the questions in this paper, candidates are often taking a more literary approach, particularly in Section A – Poetry: stylistic analysis, however in Section B – Plays: dramatic and stylistic analysis, some are exploring linguistic methods and concepts. The majority of Candidates demonstrate competent or well- developed analytical skills, falling into levels 4 and 5, and the very best show they are able to blend this analysis into a well- structured response which demonstrates a genuine engagement with the thematic concerns of the text. Examiners were impressed with the quantity of effective analytical prose many candidates are writing in the given time. However, whilst many use appropriate terminology, some do not know the basic parts of speech and use terms such as 'adverb' and 'noun' indiscriminately.

AO3 context can be approached in several ways. For poetry and drama, an understanding of how the texts fit into their social, cultural, historical and political background serves to illuminate the writer's meaning, as does a grasp of the writer's own beliefs, values and situation.

Recognising how texts may be interpreted differently according to when they are read/seen is also a valid way of exploring context. In addition, an appreciation of how a specific text or writer's work fits into literary context such as tragedy or plastic theatre is also valid. In this first examination series, context was sometimes bolted on, either in the introduction or rather suddenly in a separate paragraph, however the best approach saw candidates integrating their understanding naturally in the course of a relevant response, showing how context illuminated their understanding of the texts. Centres may be well advised to steer clear of too much biographical work; for candidates less secure in analytical skill, this learned information can form an unhelpful crutch and barrier to the task. The mark scheme shows that context is largely to do with genre conventions or the place of the poem in a thematic collection, or the position of a scene in a play. Only the most able candidates were able to wield biographical data with purpose.

AO4 connections (Section A only) is equally best served by being integrated into the analysis of the core poem. The poems chosen to make such connections should illuminate the set poem and maintain the focus on the question rather than being loosely linked through a technique or general comment about theme. Some candidates used the connection to write about poems they would have preferred to be set and these were not always relevant to the question. In a few cases, examiners reported that candidates wrote out their linked poem on the answer paper. Candidates should take a few minutes to select the linked poem(s) and plan how they will fit into the response so that, in the same way as AO3 context, they are relevant rather than bolted on. Using more than two poems leads to very brief and generalised connections, losing focus on the given poem that needs to remain central to their analysis.

Some candidates appeared to employ the same approach (Section A connections) to the contextual requirement in Section B: explore the significance of the extract within the play. Rather than spending time analysing scenes or moments from other parts of the play, a relatively brief and precise paragraph, to establish where the given extract fits in the play (characters, actions, themes) and how it moves things along, points to climax, or refers back in some way is sufficient. A brief quotation from another part of the play (e.g., 'ocular proof' in Othello), is fine, but potted or more detailed analyses of other scenes or episodes are not needed, and draw responses away from what earns the greatest reward: analysis of the given extract.

Successful responses:
- Are planned and focussed – it is better to write less in a more relevant, structured and coherent way than to write a great deal which lacks a sense of direction
- Integrate context in the course of the response rather than being bolted on, making it relevant to the terms of the question
- Explore how language and linguistic shape the meaning by identifying what the writer is saying first and then how it is said, rather than feature spotting and then trying to make it fit the question
- Genuinely engage with specific effects created by the literary devices, providing personal rather than learned explanations
- Avoid simply repeating the terms of the question
- Use linguistic methods and concepts where they are directly relevant to the question
- Avoid lengthy introductions which set out what will be explored and equally lengthy conclusions which reaffirm what has been said
- Keep the given poem and drama extract at the centre of the response
- Balance time equally across Section A and Section B

Comments on Individual Questions:

Section A – Poetry: stylistic analysis

Question 1 William Blake

This question was the most popular with connections made to a range of poems. 'The Chimney Sweeper (E & I)', The Garden of Love and 'Holy Thursday (E&I)' were the most popular choices, however relevant links were also made with Nurse's Song (E&I) 'Tyger', 'The Ecchoing Green' and ' The Garden of Love' were also employed. Candidates made connections and wrote effectively about social, cultural and historical context, having an understanding of the impact of industrialisation and Blake's religious stance. Many candidates wrote knowledgeably about the poems within the context of the Romantics. Analysis of the ways in which meanings are shaped often focussed on the metaphorical language, with some thoughtful explorations of the "mind-forged manacles" and Blake's use of repetition and anaphora. Commentary on the rhyme scheme and rhythm was often less successful, with candidates forcing a certain interpretation so that it ranged from having a "jaunty, cheerful effect" which they noted to be at odds with the subject matter to being "harsh and plodding" reflective of the controlled and trapped nature of life in the city.

Blake may be seen as a poet of our time once again and the new political engagement of young people appears to have fostered some of the grit and determination with which candidates located institutional injustice, control and corruption within 'London'. Many responses took cues from references to church and chimney sweepers to move seamlessly into poems such as 'The Ecchoing Green' and both Innocence and Experience takes on 'The Chimney Sweeper'. The most effective responses linked back again to' London' to support a consistent commentary on their chosen focus within the broad 'life of the city' offer made to them. Less successful, but still competent responses, were very concerned to keep bringing each point made, large or small, back to the focus of the question in a way that became quite repetitive to read. While examiners understand that candidates want to 'prove' what they are doing, this can be self-penalising, losing the opportunity genuinely to explore the text. They 'charter'd' their own work, in a sense. While it is interesting to look at Blake's plates in class, it is not really apt to detail them in exam answers, even as points of context, since they do not really add value to the analysis.

Question 2 Emily Dickinson

Only a few candidates responded to this question, the majority dealing well with the terms of the question. Connecting poems chosen were usually 'There's a certain Slant of Light',' I heard a Fly buzz - when I died' and 'I like to see it lap the Miles' which were relevant to the question. The natural world was often read as representative of relationships and religion. Most responses to Dickinson were able to identify the ways in which the snake is personified, and how the relationship between humanity and nature may be one of trust, or fear, or guarded trust at the very least. The relative shortness of the poem made it possible to take a top to tail approach in commentary and, for the most part, this paid off well for candidates. There were numerous readings of the last stanza, ranging from the majority interpretation of fear to the idea that the persona has been bitten. Others, taking their cue from biographical information, set it up as a retread of the Garden of Eden story. Sophisticated responses were able to use Dickinson's religious beliefs and views to support analysis in contextual terms. Others dropped in biographical data with less knowledge, or made assertions about patriarchal society.

Question 3 Seamus Heaney

Only a few candidates responded to this question. Many excellent readings of 'Churning Day' took a systematic approach and exemplified the techniques in a thoughtful and relevant way. One candidate observed the 'alchemical' quality of the process in the poem as another disappeared practice in its own right. Candidates used the personal dimension to the poem to frame their analysis and develop the significance of context and the underlying sense of belonging that runs through the collection. Given the length of the poem and the chance to be very thorough and systematic, some connections to other texts were rather brief, though usually apt. For some candidates, the fact that the Heaney poem was a 'heritage' one appeared to be a bit of a shock, as they clearly were expecting one that would enable them to talk about The Troubles. This led to a number of 'square peg and round hole' attempts to find echoes of The Troubles in 'pottery bombs' and even the 'flagged kitchen floor'. Links to some of the other poems such as 'Death of a Naturalist' 'Fodder' and 'The Tollund Man' were sometimes less successful, with some rather random or forced connections. Candidates clearly enjoyed the sensual descriptions of milk making in this poem and gave thoughtful and sensitive analysis of the sound effects and imagery.

Question 4 Eavan Boland

Very few candidates opted to write on Boland, however those who did were usually very successful with some sensitive engagement with the alienation at the heart of this account of childhood. At times, however, the approach was rather heavily context driven and such material was not always integrated into an exploration of thoughts and feelings. Centres are advised to encourage their candidates to engage with the mood and key ideas of the poems before engaging in close analysis so that they are genuinely able to show how meanings are shaped, rather than being driven by a need to identify specific techniques. Candidates sometimes missed the sense of loss and isolation that Boland presents in this poem. Connections to other poems, usually 'The New Pastoral' and 'The Famine Road' were generally relevant to the focus of the question, but at times rather simple.

Question 5 Duffy

Duffy was the second most popular choice for poetry with a good focus on the question and a very wide range of other poems from the collection used for AO4 connections. Whilst there was some reference to Duffy's own background and sexuality, Candidates generally approached AO3 through a discussion of how the set text fitted into the stages of a relationship in the collection. There was some excellent analysis seen and, perhaps because of the emotional focus of the question, a genuinely personal and perceptive engagement with the text. Connections to a wide range of other poems such as 'You', 'Hour', 'Rapture', 'Betrothal', 'Answer', 'Grief', 'Ithaca', 'Over' were effective in illuminating the given poem rather than just demonstrating wider knowledge of the collection and candidates were able to see how Duffy shows the different stages of a relationship with a relevant focus on pain and loss. Some of the Duffy responses suffered from a perceived concern to link every point made, large or small, back to the focus of the question in a way that became quite repetitive to read. Even then, as there is plenty to write about, candidates were able to show mostly secure and developed application of analytical skill, using the literary-linguistic framework to observe features such as pathetic fallacy, imagery of stars and nature, with links to the same things in play among other poems in the collection. Commentary on pronouns showed how poems relate to the reader and create a 'universalising' effect, and this made any contextual reference to Duffy's sexuality more relevant. Less successful responses drew lexis from the poem out of the context of its stanza or phrase, making for some assertion and guesswork that included the possibility of loss of a baby in one instance.

Question 6 Jacob Sam-La Rose

The candidates who responded to this question showed genuine engagement with the emotional focus of the collection and Rose's cultural context. Several mentioned Rose having visited their school and this experience had clearly inspired them to write with real enthusiasm and in a way that went beyond technique spotting. Connections to other poems, usually Speechless I,II &III, were relevant and often illuminated the core text. Responses to Jacob Sam-La Rose were often outstanding, with one candidate able to support the idea that the poem is satirical in terms of how it deals with the complexity of father-son relationships, suggesting also the futility of the exercise portrayed, as well as condemnation of those who trivialise having absent family.

Section B – Plays: dramatic and stylistic analysis

Question 7 Shakespeare

This was one of the two most popular options in the drama section and responses showed candidates have a strong knowledge and understanding of the text. Their interest in the handkerchief as the "trifles light as air" which Iago uses to such devastating effect in destroying Othello's peace of mind and relationship with Desdemona led some candidates away from close analysis of the extract, although most brought it back to a focus on dramatic and linguistic concepts. The best responses are dramatically aware, exploring staging and dramatic irony, whilst others see it less effectively as a text that is read. Some purposeful consideration of play as tragedy was evident in many answers. Many cited Grice's Maxims, Lakoff and referred to adjacency pairs, however this often led them away from a close engagement with the poetry of Othello's language and ways in which the collapse of his lucidity (and loss of his "Othello music") mirrors his downfall.

The absence of (explicit) stage directions in Shakespeare dialogue meant candidates were placed in a 'you and the words' analytical situation. Some candidates were able to excavate the stage directions implicit in Shakespeare text, which was a very satisfying thing to see. Many candidates seemed put off by Othello's longer speeches, opting to jump straight to the shorter exchanges elsewhere in the extract, often straight to the exclamatives. Candidates should be encourage to take their time before starting to write their responses, so they do not miss out on the opportunity of mining longer parts of any extract, where some of the deeper dramatic-stylistic content is more likely to be found**.**

Question 8 Wilde

The open-ended nature of this question enabled candidates to explore the dynamics of the conversation and what is revealed of the relationship between Gwendolen and Cecily. Many appeared to have a real understanding and appreciation of the nature of the comedy here. Less successful responses tended to take a rather line by line approach or spend time exploring other scenes where the confusion about Ernest is evident or where characters manipulate conversation without direct relevance to the given extract. Many candidates put the characters into useful context and, as a result, framed responses in terms of Gwendolen as city lady and Cecily as country ingenue. Others framed their analysis in terms of the play as 'Comedy of Manners', and as satirising or lampooning class status, shallow lives and attitudes. There was less focus on subtexts in play in some answers that were more descriptive and took stage directions very literally. Lengthy and detailed reference to duologues in other parts of the play were not helpful in illuminating the dynamics of the given extract.

Question 9 Williams

This was a very popular and successful drama question to which many candidates gave superb answers. The terms of the question provided all candidates with a very helpful hook on which to hang their analysis and supported development of relevant discussion. Some sensitive readings of Blanche's situation were made with integrated support judiciously selected. Candidates made reference to plastic theatre, Grice's Maxims and context related to Williams' life experience, generally to good effect. Candidates set the dynamics of Stanley and Blanche's interaction here confidently in the context of the rest of the play and the difference in their social/cultural background. Many candidates were naturally enthused by a question that offered a 'whole-play' theme and character dynamic as the way in to analysis of the extract. Responses here were sometimes prone to taking this stimuli as the cue to writing whole-play answers that would be appropriate in some of the Literature papers. Here, however, it sometimes meant significant deviation from actual analysis of the extract. It is a fine balance to strike, and many candidates used episodes and character detail that genuinely illuminated and supported their analysis of the extract. For others, 'telling the story' led them away from the task, even though the intentions were good. Many candidates referred to what Stanley and Blanche represent thematically, old and new worlds. When they integrated this understanding and identified the extract as the climax of dramatic dynamics, the use of such material was often excellent.

Question 10 Friel
There were very few responses to this question. Understanding of the text was generally secure with some relevant comments on the 1830s historical context, however candidates found it hard to go beyond exploring the change in relationships in this extract to seeing the complex interactions and tensions arising from the way translations are employed.

Question 11 Wertenbaker
This was the least popular of the questions and responses tended to be more narrative/paraphrase driven out of all the texts, with straightforward explanation of meaning. There was some awareness of the historical context of the convicts' experience and attitudes towards women, Jews and black convicts and occasional references to how the extract fits into the rest of the play.

Question 12 Butterworth
Responses to this text showed a genuine engagement with the conflict between the Council and Johnny Byron, really enjoying the ways in which he takes control and the humour of this opening scene. Candidates explored the conflict through close analysis of language and stage directions, some of it rooted in the fact that Johnny does not really engage at all with Fawcett. Most responses analysed her legal jargon, some also commenting on the internal conflict with Parsons. Most responses extended out to some of what happens later in the play, and what is foreshadowed in this opening scene. Most candidates took the opportunity to quote profanity, the best observing it as taboo lexis. Some very effective responses framed the extract in terms of Johnny's status as something from an earlier time, set against the modern threat of new settlements and a new era easing out the old, together with its ancient traditions. Some very balanced commentaries were perceptive in terms of where audience sympathies may or may not lie in the opening.

H474/03 Reading as a writer, writing as a reader

General Comments:

Candidates were, on the whole, well-prepared by centres for the tasks and there was evidence that some candidates had really embraced the spirit of this component by exploiting their study of narrative for Section A to inform and shape the writing task that they produced in Section B. The vast majority of candidates managed the three tasks within the time allocated.

Section A

This section examines candidates' understanding of narrative construction with two question options. Successful candidates were able to explore *in what ways* narrative construction shaped meaning, taking a holistic view of their text to contextualise their discussion and offering real insight into how writers create meaning by making and breaking patterns and foregrounding elements of their narrative through the choices they make. All of these candidates focused closely on the aspect of narrative set in their chosen question and used this aspect of narrative - either narrative voice or form and structure - as their framework to explore meaning.

Less successful candidates did not engage with the narrative focus of this component. Instead, they offered a generalised discussion of their text and its meaning. Such responses often demonstrated very sound understanding of the set text and its key concerns and often identified a range of linguistic and literary techniques at micro level within the text to explore connotations. However, a response that did not engage with the fundamental focus on narrative construction was a response which necessarily limited AO1 achievement as it did not offer analysis relevant to the task.

For many, the linguistic comment tended to be limited to the identification of word classes and though verbs, adjectives and adverbs were mostly identified correctly there wasn't always a great deal achieved by such identification. Technical language that goes no further than labelling is not helpful in a component which foregrounds the study of meaning creation. Candidates are clearly being taught a wealth of linguistic devices but in order to unlock the top half of the mark scheme, there should be solid understanding of how such devices create meaning, not just the ability to feature spot.

This component is an open book assessment. For those candidates who know their text extremely well, the open book environment enables them to consider the whole shape of the narrative construction in their response as well as to offer precisely selected examples, dipping into the text at appropriate points to illustrate their discussion. The open book environment cannot, however, replace fundamental textual knowledge. There were some candidates who demonstrated weak textual knowledge, selecting sections of the text apparently at random and then mining what they had found as though tackling unseen material, offering close language analysis without either the selection of the moment or the analysis bearing relevance to the narrative prompt in the question.

Some candidates wrote at considerable length in Section A with the consequence that there was quite a lot of repetition. There was good evidence that candidates who took time to plan and prepare their response before writing were able to access marks in the top two levels of the mark scheme, producing concise and pertinent discussion.

Question 1

The question on narrative voice was the most popular question option. It was an accessible question for all ability levels and clearly appropriate to all text choices. Strong candidates had been well-prepared to consider the manipulation of the reader through shifting voices. These

responses considered some of the wide range of voice perspectives such as the creation of individual character voices, the author's recognisable voice, first person personae and third person narration and focalisation. In all these responses credit could be given where the candidates considered how choices made by the writer manipulated meaning and the reader's response to the narrative.

Weaker candidates struggled to engage with the concept of narrative voice, beyond being able to identify whether the text was written from a first or third person perspective. Some candidates attempted to re-cast the task by asserting, for example, that the narrative voice 'creates symbols' or that the author 'uses narrative voice to describe the setting' and then offering an essay on a different aspect of narrative but clearly one which the candidate preferred to write about. All of these responses offered only a weak analysis of how narrative voice shapes meaning in texts.

The Great Gatsby was the most popular text and Nick Carraway's narration offered ripe material for candidates across the ability range. A wide range of technical labels for the narrative voice were offered with Nick identified most frequently as an unreliable, peripheral homodiegetic participant in the narrative who has both privileged and limited access to events in the novel. A handful of strong candidates framed their discussion of the narrative voice from Nick's position 'within and without' and were able to explore how Nick's narration both captivates and repels the reader as he himself is captivated and repelled by his experiences. Some candidates were also sensitive to the influence on the narration of the time lapse between the narrated events and Nick's relation of the story and also of the choices he makes to withhold information. At all times, the most successful responses explored how the reader is positioned by the narrative voice to respond to events. Alternate voices such as those of Jordan, Michaelis and even young Gatz through the list his father has saved, briefly take over the narration and successful candidates were able to comment on the impact on the reader of shifting perspectives and framing.

Things Fall Apart was another popular option for this question. Strong candidates were able to explore the criticisms (of Igbo culture; of the white colonial powers), that lie behind the omniscient and apparently non-judgemental and simplistic third person narrative. The child-like focalisation of Ikemefuna and the District Commissioner's debate about whether to offer a chapter or paragraph to Okonkwo's story offered many candidates an opportunity to explore the significance of voices within the narrative. The oral tradition was also heard in the cadences of the novel and considered by stronger candidates.

The other texts proved less popular but offered similar wealth of material. In *Atonement,* Briony's contrasting younger and older voices were considered and the manipulation of the reader was a key focus. In *Jane Eyre* Jane's older and frank reflections about her naive and younger self which inform much of the narrative were also fruitfully considered.

Question 2
Although very much less popular, the question on form and structure also offered strong candidates great opportunity for analysis and strong responses were seen. Some candidates were able to use their understanding of genre to view their texts through the codes and conventions of different forms, for example, reading Okonkwo's downfall or Gatsby's death through the lens of tragedy.

Some candidates struggled to understand what is meant by 'form' and it is fair to say that only few candidates touched on much of the rich material that these novels offer in terms of structural analysis. Many did not consider the prompt in the question which invited consideration of *the function* of form and structure. The question invited candidates to explore the significance of beginnings and endings, the whole shape of the narrative, framing structures, analepsis and prolepsis, significant episodes and their relation to the wider text. Whilst candidates were usually able to consider the ordering of events, they were much less confident going beyond this in their consideration of structure.

The Great Gatsby generated some strong responses, often focusing on disrupted chronology but few candidates really delved into the delicate construction of Gatsby's character through the jigsaw of details presented to the reader by Nick. There was some reference to Chapter 5 as the key moment of the climax of the reunion between Gatsby and Daisy and, where this was evident, its significance within the structure of the whole text was well considered, particularly in terms of the change it prompts in Gatsby. By contrast, there was very little discussion of the structural parallel of the parties in Chapters 3 and 6 and the different moods and atmospheres at both due to the presence of the Buchanans at the latter and there was also less focus on the rapid denouement and the tragic end or the arrival of Henry Gatz.

Things Fall Apart: Some candidates paid close attention to the structure and the clues given away at the opening about the protagonist. The ending was often considered, although its implication for the final view presented by the novel was not always elucidated. The concept of 'writing back' in response to *Heart of Darkness* was considered fruitfully by many, however.

Jane Eyre Many candidates used the approach of tracking the structure of the text through the five key locations which was valid where the focus remained on the meaning generated by structure. There were some useful comments on bildungsroman form and the autobiographical form although these were rarely fully developed. Candidates often struggled to get beyond a simple understanding of chronological structure and some candidates lapsed into description of events rather than exploration of order, sequence and the meaning generated by these. As an example, the St John episode is an interlude between the Thornfield sections, but the significance of its placement in the novel was rarely explored. The movement towards the happy ending, despite the obstacle of Bertha Mason and the first marriage hurdle, and the concept of the conventional happy ending and full resolution were little considered. Context was often well incorporated but, for some, a little tagged on.

Very few responses were seen on this question on the other set texts.

Section B

Question 3
Section B Q3 on this paper invites candidates to apply their study of narrative to a short piece of creative writing by manipulating one of two basic storylines offered on the paper in the construction of a story opening. Both storyline options were popular, though Storyline 2 was the more so.

The strongest work was very impressive. Some candidates did manage to be experimental in the ways of telling a story, even within the confines of an exam, and there were approaches such as flashback, retrospective narration or the use of a frame narrative with candidates recognising the need to manipulate their narrative in terms of chronology and perspective. Such candidates could employ techniques creatively and with control to produce writing which was engaging and clearly crafted for effect. Some candidates deliberately employed narrative techniques they had identified in the novel studied for Section A and this tended to be effective and provide useful grounds for discussion in the commentary. Some of the more successful narratives also used humour effectively, particularly in response to Storyline 1, and such an approach is entirely legitimate.

However, many candidates did struggle to lift themselves above the predictable. Several candidates got rather bogged down in detail and the process of the more pedestrian aspects of their narrative. The process of getting to the park or the mechanics of receiving a text message in Storyline 2, at times, *became* the story. Such pieces offered limited linguistic and structural crafting and often relied heavily on cliché.

Many weaker candidates merely told the plot of the storyline without considering how they might manipulate structure or voice or point of view to create a more engaging piece of writing. For

these candidates, decisions about their narrative were limited to whether a first or third person narrator was selected and to some basic descriptive details. The instructions on the paper make clear that not all the bullet points need to be included and candidates might well benefit from not seeking to cover too much ground. The more generic approach that interpreted Storyline 2 solely in terms of horror conventions did lead to predictability. There was no reason why Storyline 2 couldn't have been interpreted as something comical, light-hearted or romantic even - rather than alluding at the end, as most did, to a pretty bleak immediate future for the protagonist. Candidates are encouraged to practise tackling storyline options by viewing them through different generic 'lenses' to see how this would open the range of narrative options. Genre is not assumed in the storyline frameworks set in the exam.

There were a handful of candidates who appeared to re-produce pre-prepared material which bore no relation to the storylines set. This task is focused on candidates' understanding of narrative and the manipulation of the unseen storyline is fundamental to assessing their ability to craft narrative. Where writing was so far removed from the original storylines presented so as to raise genuine doubt that they were prompted by them, this will have significantly limited what AO5 achievement is possible. This is not an exam for which pre-prepared creative writing will ever be able to meet the marking criteria.

Accuracy was frequently an issue with many weaker candidates. One of the most significant issues causing these candidates problems was the difficulty of sustaining the tense they had chosen to write in and this will have limited their AO5 achievement as a result. Candidates would benefit from practising re-casting their writing in different tenses. All candidates would benefit from planning and proof-reading practice.

Question 4
Commentary will be a new skill for many candidates and so a variability in approach here was to be expected in the first series of the component. Commentaries were most effective when the effects of *some* judiciously selected techniques were commented on in detail and went beyond merely saying what was there to why it was there and how it had a genuine impact on the wider narrative. Candidates who were able to reflect on what techniques didn't successfully contribute to their writing, as well as those that did, showed sound reflection on their narrative craft. Candidates who had made interesting choices about point of view, chronology and narrative framing tended to have more to say here than those who could merely identify pathetic fallacy and descriptive techniques.

Less effective commentaries employed a checklist approach of identifying all the techniques used but not really convincingly examining what had been achieved by their use. Candidates are invited to select and explore significant aspects of the narrative that *create meaning*: comments such as 'In my writing I use frequent paragraphs to make it clearer' do not further an analysis of significant narrative choices. Some made claims for their use of techniques which were empty, ('makes the reader read on'), and some claimed more for their work than could be justified on the narrative evidence offered. Where candidates struggled with what to say in the commentary, this tended to indicate that few interesting crafting choices that were worthy of exploration had been made.

Again, writing at greater length in the commentary is not necessarily beneficial. An acute and focused discussion of some effects tended to be more successful than an overview of all.

H474/04 NEA Independent Study: analysing and producing texts

General Comments:

The vast majority of centres submitted NEA folders with tasks that were appropriate for Component 04 Independent Study and should be congratulated for their hard work and expertise in guiding their candidates carefully towards meeting the requirements of the Assessment Objectives. The enthusiasm and commitment of teachers in embracing the demands of the new NEA and the engagement of candidates with approaches to non-fiction study and original writing were inspiring, often ambitious. For the first series in May-June 2017, the essential demands of comparative analysis for Task 1 and creativity in writing in a non-fiction genre for Task 2 were met, and in many submissions, confidently delivered. It is now desirable for centres to guide all candidates towards taking greater individualised ownership of both tasks.

Comments on Individual Tasks:

Task 1

All candidates fulfilled the requirement to study a text from the prescribed list in the specification and a post-2000 published text. This requirement allowed for the study of numerous traditional texts or the study of contemporary writing or a mixture of both. The selections of Task 1 text pairings allowed for interesting text combinations and fascinating explorations into complementary studies of non-fiction texts with other non-fiction texts, sometimes written in different non-fiction genres, or another prescribed one, or poetry (*Ariel, The Book of Matches*), drama (*Equus, Romeo and Juliet, People, Places and Things*), fiction and graphic novels. Text pairings which had been chosen in the spirit of academic enquiry gave candidates more genuine scope for independent exploration and there were many centres at which candidates had studied a range of set texts combined with a diverse selection of texts of their own choice which is the recommended approach.

At some Centres one prescribed text had been studied by all candidates and used as an anchor for the study of key linguistic and literary methods which enabled some degree of differentiation and individualised essays. For example, *Stasiland* being compared with one of a range of dystopian novels was a very effective approach. The novels, from *Brave New World, The Handmaid's Tale* to *Never Let Me Go,* all generated an interesting imagined counterpoint to the actual dystopian society depicted by Funder. Choices of narrative fiction compared with a literary non-fiction prescribed text also generated interesting debates on form and purpose, for example, *The Bell Jar* paired with *Why be Happy When You Could Be Normal*. Intriguing distinctions were forged between Capote's novelistic treatment of real-life events in *In Cold Blood* and non-fiction accounts such as *Orange is the New Black* or *Columbine, A Life Inside* or fiction such as *Hey Nostradamus* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin.* There were perceptive analyses forming distinctions between different approaches to memoir, for example, *Down and Out in Paris and London* was linked with *The Lady in the Van.* Whereas some text pairings focused on the construction of humour for particular audiences, for example, *The Fry Chronicles, Further Adventures of an Idiot Abroad, Life and Laughing* and *Moranthology* provided effective comparisons with *The Lost Continent: Travels in Small Town America.* *Stuart: A Life Backwards* was a particularly popular choice and was compared with texts such as *The Catcher in the Rye, Men in My Town, Methland, Chavs: The Demonisation of the Working Class, The Kite Runner* and *Looking for Alaska.*

At some centres, whilst a range of tasks worded differently was in evidence, a number had the same topic which led to a similarity of arguments developed and textual evidence in the cohort's essays, especially when all candidates were comparing the same texts, and this is not to be recommended in future NEA submissions. There were centres where candidates had combined Young Adult fiction such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* and *Noughts and Crosses* with a prescribed non-fiction text and if the tasks were sufficiently taxing, these could be made to be part of a demanding, scholarly essay but how candidates are guided towards meeting the Assessment Objectives ambitiously is vital in raising the ceiling on what can be achieved.

Task 1 is designed to be a study in significant depth of two whole texts and this requirement was met. Task titles that were sharply focused were more likely to lead to tightly constructed argument providing ample opportunity to elicit stylistic, thematic and contextual connections across the two texts. Therefore, an appreciation of how the texts are constructed, the writers' approaches to shaping meaning and the genre differences between the two texts used for Task 1 should direct the composition of the comparative analysis. Much freedom has been given to centres in the spirit of scholarly enterprise by the Text and Task Approval Service for choosing tasks that can have either stylistic or thematic/contextual steers but it is worth noting that the essays produced are measured against the marking criteria of the Assessment Objectives and therefore should address these.

AO1

Moderators remarked on how a wider range of linguistic and literary terminology in particular might be anticipated from candidates given marks by centres in Levels 5 and 6 for AO1 as well as a certain level of Advanced Level literacy in terms of lexical and syntactical sophistication. More detailed use of appropriate terminology could consolidate candidates' positions more highly within levels and AO1 was often a strong indicator of the quality of the response overall. The register used should be appropriate for a formal essay. Referring to the texts as "books" avoids defining genres and again the specificity of a candidate's own language use indicates the level of understanding of the central requirement of addressing the differences between genres. Responses placed in the higher range should have had sufficient proof-reading. Furthermore, a greater range of discourse markers to signal the direction of an argument is also advised. It is important that essays at the higher end of the range are steered energetically from the opening paragraph and maintain a probing, discriminating critically addressed focus, not lapsing into description, general explanations or narrative recall. In terms of achieving a conclusion, rather than circling back to points already made, an emphatic final overview really crystallises a well-managed argument.

AO2

Those aspiring to the higher levels do need to demonstrate a more detailed, synthesized approach thus applying methods of literary and linguistic analysis rigorously and commenting on lexical and structural details with sustained and critically addressed embedded stylistic evaluation. Centres need to ensure that responses which focus mainly on surface features of style or word classes, without making precise comments as to the effects created, are positioned in the lower levels. Moderators noted that some responses were more linguistically focused, and others more literary and some more blended, interweaving both methodologies which led to different kinds of genre connections, differing kinds of writing and interesting divergences in focus which is very much in the spirit of the NEA Independent Study. Overall, form and structure were not as well tackled as language devices and there is more scope for analysis of how meanings are shaped with narrative methods and by contrasting genre differences, not just with the treatment of semantic choices and syntactical devices. Differentiating between the narrative voice and perspective used in a non-fiction text and fiction is crucial in discriminating between the ways in which characters are imaginatively conceived and the predicaments of real people are filtered.

AO3

Centres were confident in the handling of the significance of contexts with representations of poverty, loss, family relationships, of individuals or groups of people, of murderers and reprobates, experiences of slavery, gender inequality, mental health difficulties, homelessness, social inequality, the status of women, childhood experiences, adoption experiences, the American Dream, the question of nature versus nurture, aspects of the New Journalism. However, text pairings chosen without contextual connections tended to present more generalised discussions or character based links which pushed contextual discussion to the periphery.

Moderators noted that the discussion of relevant contemporary or C20th cultural, political and social concerns was extremely well-handled, diverse and incorporated within the critical debate such as the links traced between *I am the Secret Footballer* and *The Damned United* or *What the Chinese Don't Eat* and *Love in a Fallen City* or *Stasiland* and *Alone in Berlin*. There was also an interest in the ways in which psychological contexts could underpin texts, (for instance *Sybil* compared with *Hyperbole and a Half* or *The Examined Life* compared with *Reasons to Stay Alive*), and awareness of the different receptions of the text by readers from different eras or social environments, for example in *Down and Out in Paris and London* when compared with *No Fixed Abode.*

The ways in which autobiographical/biographical contexts unlock the writers' stylistic approaches could be an area of further scrutiny. Adventurous or even unlikely comparisons can prove fruitful such as a comparison between *Stuart, A Life Backwards* and *The Autobiography of Eleanor Roosevelt*. The notion of "genre context" needs more probing investigation and emphasising as a means of effectively integrating AO3 and AO4.

AO4

Tasks should be framed to nurture a coherent well-structured comparative thesis. AO4 is the most heavily weighted assessment objective and the task chosen should enable its fulfilment and steer argument enabling an integrated, fluid handling which illuminates subtle variations rather than a straightforward listing of shared features. Essays with assured discussions of counter arguments were useful in discriminating between the quality of the connections or the strength of the differences in the treatment of time and structure, flashbacks, chiastic structure, parody, humour/satire, interview material used differently, narrative voices, irony, symbolism, the power of storytelling, individual idiolects, gendered voices, change in language use over time, pathos, writers as characters within the text, the use of verbatim accounts, jargon, journalistic devices, objective and/or subjective interpretations, rhetorical devices, the use of the expert voice, the use of first person perspectives etc.

On the whole this series, most candidates showed a confident ability to explore meaningful literary and linguistic links between their texts, driven forward by methodologies and concepts with very few writing in effect two separate but occasionally linked essays with sweeping statement style connections of their text pairings. There was room for more critically addressed probing in some of the responses which were more character based in scope and required more assiduous application of the terminology advised for AO1. On occasion essays foregrounding thematic links could veer towards more topic based discussions and lose sight of forming linguistic and literary evaluation of which text in which genre or sub-genre has a more effective style.

Task 2

Many centres were keen to exploit the opportunities afforded by NEA and there was a general sense that many candidates enjoyed the experimental crafting involved in creating their own original non-fiction writing pieces. It was pleasing to see a variety of imaginative, innovative and very lively non-fiction original writing tasks, many as authentic in tone, mood and style as "real" non-fiction texts. Moreover, many candidates followed individual, topical interests reflective of this generation's zeitgeist.

AO2

Many candidates were able to explain clearly in the introduction how their original writing pieces reflected the audience, context, purpose, lexical choices and stylistic features of the style model following its genre conventions. In some introductions there was a need to outline the stylistic techniques adopted from a style model more precisely using critical terminology to explain how the conventions of the non-fiction genre were being adopted.

However, occasionally some moderators had mixed experiences of the accompanying introductions. In some cases, the introduction was very short, too list like or vague in its frames of reference and needed to be more incisive. Some introductions were placed at the end of the original writing piece and seemed to be an afterthought. Ideally, introductions should be clearly signposted with a subheading "Introduction", positioned at the beginning of Task 2, and should direct attention towards the candidates' aims in creating original writing in a non-fiction genre with a clear outcome and a critical focus. AO2 is dominant for the introduction so the concentration of the comments should be on matters of form, structure and language rather than of character, plot and theme. In some higher range responses, the introductions to the task could have more explicitly addressed the AO2 requirement for detailed demonstration of the ways meanings are shaped in texts.

AO5
An evocative, catchy or witty title for the original writing piece is advised. Indicating the non-fiction genre used, if this has not been classified in the Introduction, is also helpful.

The most interesting original writing was genuinely creative within a non-fiction form that showed a clear understanding of genre conventions. Being able to shape and craft a text is key to success in this element of the NEA, and this only comes about if candidates have had a thoughtful exposure to appropriate style models. Candidates are advised to explicitly focus on a range of genres and style features before undertaking their own writing, indeed extracts from any of the prescribed texts would provide source materials. Once having decided on a topic that is important and interesting to them, they should undertake research, preferably drawing on real knowledge and authentic experience before producing a piece that creates something original within the known parameters of the non-fiction form. The influence in terms of style models of other texts studied throughout the Advanced Level also gave many of the Task 2 pieces a genuinely synoptic quality. It is worth noting for future submissions, however, that it is essential to use a non-fiction style model, rather than a literary text or "fictionalised" context, as writing in the conventions of a chosen non-fiction genre are the focus for the task.

A range of both written and spoken modes were used including: blogs, diaries, editorials, features articles, gonzo journalism, various forms of life writing, listicles, memoirs, obituaries, opinion articles, parodies, pieces in the form of a letter to a family member or friend, podcasts, polemics, reviews of all kinds, satires, a science textbook, speeches, "TED" style talks, travelogues, travel writing.

Some pieces were stridently written with some strong topics aired and knowledge of the topics concerned shown and were able to articulate ideas towards the specific demographics of the chosen audience. Others were confessional, confiding in tone or humorous, even pillorying and scurrilous. The more personal nature of many of the pieces gave them an immediacy and vitality that evinced real lived experience convincingly. Popular journalistic style models included Paul

Mason and Caitlin Moran. Satirical writing was another popular choice and centres often cited Swiftian satire as their style model. A subtlety in approach to the satirical target in the responses was a discriminator in the success of writing of this kind.

Blogs as a non-fiction genre are still evolving forms, rather free range in scope and still acquiring specific genre features so the blogs submitted could be formless. Bloggers do tend, however, to become passionately involved with their chosen subject in their chains of blogs, which is an essential stylistic characteristic to evoke, and maintaining a particular blogger's voice, vocabulary and tone consistently was a key discriminator amongst the higher achieving blogs. Even the most spontaneously seeming streams of consciousness require crafting. Less original blogs were presented as merely an online form in which to write about an experience and lacked shape, control and even more crucially, any defined sense of the audience who would read the blog.

Autobiographical, life writing was another widespread choice. One of the challenges of producing original autobiographical, life writing or memoirs is in the shaping and mediating of lived experience in which accounts from real life are convincingly transformed, often with hindsight, such as in the style models *Twelve Years a Slave* or *Skating to Antarctica*. Whist much original writing presented engaging life writing, in some there was a lack of overview and reflection, and the attempt to universalise personal experience that tends to characterise the quality of resonance that enriches the best memoirs. The use of diary form was, on occasion, less original in conception and tended towards the recounting of an experience from childhood or holiday travel sometimes in a formulaic approach. Another very popular choice was travel writing, the best based on style models such as *A Cook's Tour: Global Adventures in Extreme Cuisines, Uneasy Rider* or the Lonely Planet Guides; in some instances travelogues were also formulaic and there was not always quite the sense of this material being shaped and crafted with originality. An area for development would be for candidates to demonstrate more expertise in graphology using style models such as *Maus* or *Marbles: Mania, Depression, Michelangelo and Me.*

The responses that presented the most clarity in introductions, clearly indicating the context, audience and purpose of the pieces of original writing, were best executed in the original writing part of the response. The key words from AO5 at the higher levels – "flair", "control" and "creativity" are relevant for original pieces that demonstrate a firm grasp of genre requirements, a control of voice, with material shaped and crafted with consistent expertise in its ability to construct and sustain the tone, pace and register of the piece. Writing that would benefit from further proof-reading and editing should not be placed in the highest level of the marking criteria.

Administration

All NEA folders require completed front cover sheets with task titles and summative comments completed fully and attached to the folders. It is helpful if centres indicated on the cover sheet which of the texts is post 2000. Candidate names and numbers should be filled in accurately. The final marks awarded by the centre should be indicated clearly on front cover sheets and these should match the final marks awarded by the centre within the folder demarcated for each task and match the marks sent to OCR. Summative comments should be completed on the front cover sheet explaining how the assessment objectives have been achieved within the folder. Marginal annotations alongside each task are also useful as are the comments made during internal moderation.

Please note that the expectation is that all folders requested in the sample should be sent to the external moderator promptly.

Treasury tags are the preferred means of attaching a folder together; loose sheets, (especially without candidate names or numbers), should not be sent to the moderator.

All NEA folders should ideally abide by the suggested word count threshold. The total word limit for the NEA folder is 3200 words maximum: 1500-2000 words for Task 1, including quotations, (and footnotes and bibliography if used); 1000-1200 words for Task 2, (including a 150 word introduction). Candidates can choose if one essay is longer or shorter than advised lengths.
For further advice on tasks and text pairings, it is important that all centres should seek clarification through the Text and Task Approval Service.

Although many centres encouraged a variety of assignments and text pairings, it is hoped that as the NEA Independent Study moves forward, centres will build on their successes during this first series and continue to experiment, nurturing independent choices so that candidates can pursue their own interests with texts and tasks they could own, approaching both tasks with a stronger sense of autonomy. Herewith some moderators' final comments: *"H474/04 has been an absolute delight to moderate and I really look forward to many years ahead of seeing the Specification come to fruition."*…… *"The NEA Independent Study is a fantastic opportunity for candidates to read widely, explore texts and topics of interest to them and to develop their own critical voices."*

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