Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

GCSE English (5EH03)
Creative Response

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General Overview

Overall, most centres were accurately applying standards for the various components of this Unit.

The single greatest cause of errant marking continues to be in centres that had not internally standardised the judgements of their teachers. Internal standardisation remains a vital part of the process which centres need to undertake. Attendance at regional standardising meetings by a representative of the English department, preferably the teacher with responsibility for GCSE/KS4, is linked to the internal standardising process. This has always been and remains the reason that Awarding Bodies strongly recommend that time is set aside to ensure robust internal standardising procedures are in place.

Speaking and Listening Tasks

Although all centres were using completely new criteria, they had generally applied these accurately when marking the performances observed during the moderation visits undertaken. In many centres, good use seemed to have been made of the Edexcel Standardising DVD, both to internally standardise teaching teams and also to indicate to students the standards required for the award of particular grades. The practice of video recording their own candidates paid dividends, both as a means for internally standardising judgements across the team and also – significantly – for use instead of 'live' candidates during the moderation visit. Not only does this facilitate 're-visiting' candidates where there is a discrepancy between the centre mark and the moderator mark, it means that this very same candidates' work can be taken to a department meeting and the decisions explained.

Centres are reminded that the only tangible 'evidence' available when moderating this work during the visit to centres is the contemporaneous notes kept by teachers at the point of assessment. Although moderators reported some very good practice in this regard, there was also a concern that in some centres these notes were lacking in detail, and in a tiny majority there were no notes being kept at all. It is vital that centres ensure they are accurately reflecting the judgements they make about their candidates. This is to ensure that:

- robust internal standardising has taken place to guarantee that all teachers are applying accurate standards;
- the teacher with responsibility for GCSE within the department is confident that there is sufficient detail in the notes being kept by teachers to justify the higher marks.

Centres need to be aware that a feature of future moderation visits will be a check by moderators whether the centre considers they have any candidates who are likely to get significantly higher marks for Speaking and Listening, and where practicable, these candidates should feature in the sample being jointly marked during the visit.

Poetry (Reading)

It would be possible to apply the *Assessment Criteria for Poetry (Reading)* as if the main emphasis is on 'technique spotting'. However, when using the grid, teachers need to see the criteria statements as relating to the *creation of meaning.* Thus the use of *literary techniques to create effect* should be interpreted as concerning the poets' choice of language in order to convey ideas, attitudes and feelings – i.e. how meaning is made. The second bullet point, *how techniques contribute to the effects created,* concerns the extent to which students are able to explicitly discuss language choices and poetic devices and thus links strongly to the fourth bullet point requiring *clear, relevant textual reference to support response*. It is these interconnected criteria which teachers need to apply in a holistic way when reaching a judgement about how well their students have understood the three poems in the Controlled Assessment response.

In general, teachers had applied the mark scheme accurately and few centres had their marks adjusted. Some excellent work had been rightly awarded marks in the highest ranges. There was some over-marking of responses which simply followed a PEE framework. This approach is a useful preparation for textual study and can benefit students for whom the reading of poetry is a challenge. However, where there is a need to show perceptive and discriminating analysis for students being awarded high marks, a more fully conceptualised response than the rather mechanical PEE procedure is necessary.

Creative Writing

Writing responses were generally accurately marked by centres across all Bands. There was greater variation in marking the AO3(iii) element. As many centres were harsh in their judgement of this element, as those who marked leniently. There were examples of quite wide variations of approach being applied within the same centres, implying that greater attention to this aspect may need to be given at internal standardising. There is inevitably a need to apply 'best fit' approaches which balance the constituent bullet points of spelling, punctuation and sentence construction. Where candidates are using an ambitious and wide-ranging vocabulary, they may make more spelling errors than candidates who are restricted to a basic lexicon of common words. This should not prevent them

from being awarded marks in the upper Bands if the responses are using punctuation in an interesting way and where there is a high degree of crafting and control in terms of sentence structure. Centres were generally more secure in applying the wider terms of the AO3(i) and (ii) criteria.

Task Feedback

Speaking and Listening

The commentary made for the last two rounds of assessment, which had very small cohorts entering, has proved to be germane to the large cohort who took this Unit in June 2012 and thus bear repetition. Although the contexts have been given different names and the Band descriptors are new, the tasks which had previously been used for GCSE Speaking and Listening remained appropriate for use in the new Specification. Characters from *Of Mice and Men* continued to feature in the *Creating and Sustaining Role* activity; candidates presented their ideas, interests and opinions on a range of topics to their classmates to show how they *Communicate and Adapt* their spoken language; groups of anything between two and seven pupils once again explored the established canon of topics from animal cruelty to school uniform to *Interact and Respond*. Although there is no 'ideal' size for a group, evidence from visits indicate that once there are more than four candidates involved, the potential for one or more to find it difficult to join in is increased.

In sharing good practice around Speaking and Listening, centres at Regional Network meetings have sometimes asked that a list of effective tasks is published. While this may very well emerge on the forums or other areas of the website, this Report would wish to note that a task which fails to ignite one set of students may very well 'do the business' remarkably well in a different place at a different time. In this first round of assessment it may be more useful to identify some key principles which allowed candidates to access the full range of marks for each context.

In general terms, it is useful to remind ourselves of research promoted many years ago by the National Oracy Project (NOP). Drawing on the work of the linguist M.A.K. Halliday, the NOP suggested that there were three aspects to consider when students talk to or with each other:

- Ideational aspects (what is said)
- Interpersonal aspects (how it is said)
- Textual aspects (the form chosen to say it)

Each of these will be important every time we assess how effective students have been in a Speaking and Listening task. They may very well provide the

basis for any field notes teachers keep to back up their judgments and keep a record for the purposes of moderation.

To take the third of those aspects first, whatever context they are working in, the words candidates choose to use and the way in which they structure them will be key to ensuring they achieve the highest mark of which they are capable. Just as assessments in writing require a wide and interesting vocabulary and a sophistication in the way in which a piece is structured, the same is true of the *textual* aspects of Speaking and Listening: in all three contexts the words they use and the way they deploy them will be a key consideration when awarding a mark.

The *ideational* aspect helps us to realise that, to achieve in Band 5 for Communicating and Adapting for example, candidates must be engaging with 'complex and demanding subject matter'. In some cases during moderation visits, very able students were constrained by being asked to give a presentation about 'my hobby' or 'work experience'. Whilst these could involve complex and challenging material, too often they did not: they were a general description of activities. Some excellent Band 5 work was observed where candidates had, for example, given detailed presentations about the impact of global warming, the moral responsibility of the media to present positive representations of ethnic minorities or whether violence is ever justified to promote an idea or cause.

A similar point could be made about Interacting and Responding. To achieve in Band 5, candidates must show 'understanding of complex ideas through interrogating what is said'. It is thus necessary for the task the group is set to contain sufficiently challenging material for individuals to develop the ideational aspect of their performance.

Although *interpersonal* skills are important to ensure audience engagement in Communicating and Adapting and Listening and Responding, it is the third context, Creating and Sustaining a role, where there is considerable emphasis on this aspect. Candidates must use a range of skills to 'become someone else in an 'as if' situation'. These skills will include:

- Voice: accent, pace, pitch, volume, inflection
- Facial expression
- Gesture and posture
- Using language suitable to the role
- Movement
- Idiosyncratic behaviour

It is also important to remember that this context requires students to both create and *sustain* a role.

A final consideration for the Creating and Sustaining role assessment is the extent to which the task set genuinely requires candidates to 'become someone else'. Some tasks used on moderation visits put the emphasis on task-focused roles which required little consideration of character. If students are asked to be a Youth Worker as part of a discussion on developing community facilities, there is the possibility that they present good ideas and use a wide vocabulary – but remain essentially themselves. Of course it would be possible to develop a character who is a youth worker and give them very different characteristics. However, it was noticeable that where candidates were taking a character from literature as their starting point, it was often easier for them to adopt a persona different from themselves.

The alternative approach, used by many centres, is to ask candidates to 'become' a character from a text they have read. The clear advantage is that there is a back story to inform the candidates' development of their role. This often featured characters from set texts, although some interesting variations were observed. A Year 10 girl in one centre was observed performing a gripping monologue in role as Quasimodo, created after her reading of the Victor Hugo text as part of a Wider Reading unit. Some moderators did, however, comment that, on occasions, candidates seemed more concerned about remembering textual detail and this got in the way of their attempts to 'become' the character and deploy the skills outlined above.

Poetry (Reading)

This Unit continues to produce a lively range of responses from across the ability range in response to the Poetry Tasks. *Clashes and Collisions* and *Relationships* remained the most popular, but there were responses to poems in all four collections. If evidence were needed that standards at GCSE are rising rather than being 'dumbed down', moderators' reports of the excellent work from the ablest candidates, as well as the engaged and personal responses of even some of the weakest, provide ample testimony.

As with previous rounds, most candidates followed the rubric of the task and responded to three poems. In the very few cases where they did not, candidates had usually met the requirements of the criteria and so were awarded a mark by the centre which recognised positive achievement, but made a reduction of a few marks to reflect the infringement. There are no hard and fast rules for how to calculate a mark reduction where only two poems have been considered. However, as broad guidance, for a candidate who is operating in Band 5 for the two poems written about, a mark reduction of 4, equivalent to nearly a whole Band, would be appropriate. However, for candidates in lower Bands, the same rubric infringement would appropriately only incur a 2 mark

reduction, recognising the need to calibrate the penalty in relation to the marks awarded.

While a number of centres had encouraged their candidates to produce individual interpretations based on the own reading, there was an increase in the number who seemed to have taught the same three poems to which candidates responded in a very similar way, often making the same points about identical textual references. Whilst it is always difficult to know how much support to offer candidates, especially at the lower end of the mark range, over-scaffolding runs the danger of capping performance, especially in the higher mark bands. Where candidates had been taught the skills of analysis and given the confidence to apply these themselves, responses were often more sophisticated and more likely to access the upper end of the mark range.

Although there is no requirement to compare the three poems, there is also no restriction on this approach being adopted. Where it was, it often helped candidates to display the sophistication and discrimination necessary to achieve at the highest level.

Fewer centres than had been expected made use of the opportunity for candidates to present their work as a multimodal response. Those who did take this option, usually for the lower ability candidates, used podcasts or video recorded 'to camera' presentations. A few simply presented a set of Powerpoint slides. While this is within the rubric, it is difficult to see how these in themselves differ greatly from a written response. The best use of Powerpoint was where a 'to camera' presentation was supported by a largely visual set of slides which complemented what was being said. The most ambitious multimodal response was a website created with a range of pages which were visually interesting, but which clearly met the assessment criteria.

One final point which is worth reiterating: the Literary Heritage poem is **not** unseen. It can be presented for study at the same time as the other poems from the Anthology.

Creative Writing:

At the time that this Specification was developed, Ofsted had reported negatively about the quality of writing in secondary schools.

> Many of the lessons seen during the survey showed there was a clear need to reinvigorate the teaching of writing. Pupils were not motivated by the writing tasks they were given and saw no real purpose to them.
>
> *English at the Crossroads: Ofsted 2009*

Judging by the responses to the Tasks in this round, some re-invigoration has begun. Even the weakest candidates were often writing at some length in an engaged way. The best continue to produce stunning results worthy of publication.

The most successful work indicated an understanding on the part of the candidates (and by implication their teachers) that this task is about producing the best quality writing, not necessarily a large quantity of it. Although there is a suggested word limit of 1000, the best responses were often shorter. It was evident from marginal notes made by candidates that many centres had used two sessions of one hour to conduct this Controlled Assessment. In some cases candidates appeared to have been advised to spend a large part of the first session planning and rough drafting and the remaining time writing up a final version. These responses thus often showed many drafting changes, making the work look untidy in presentation, but of a higher quality in terms of crafted end product.

It is worth noting that the visual stimuli are provided as a starting point from which pupils can set off on a journey culminating, in the words of the teacher filmed piloting the Unit for the *Getting Ready To Teach* events, 'the luxury of sitting down quietly and undisturbed for two hours to create'. Work is not marked for how closely it ties in to the imagery from which it developed: it is the quality of crafted writing only which is judged.

Administration

The process of moderation was somewhat affected by difficulties with administration. One of the most significant issues was the failure of centres to include the top and bottom marked candidates with their sample. These are not automatically selected by the computer system; therefore, if they are not part of the selected sample, centres are asked to ensure that they include both top and bottom marked candidates, in addition to the requested sample.

There has been a change in the wording of Ofqual's Code of Practice for the new specifications in relation to annotation. It is possible to interpret the new Code as indicating that no annotation is necessary on Controlled Assessment scripts. It is certainly the case that teachers will not have needed to add annotations for students as, unlike coursework, once the responses are finished, they are handed in and cannot be changed. However, centres are reminded that, in the first instance, moderators are looking to confirm centre marks. Where annotation is included, and is addressed to the moderator to indicate how marks have been arrived at, it considerably helps the process of re-marking. Centres will be aware that there are key words used in the Band descriptors. It is helpful

if these are referenced in the annotation, but important that they are used accurately.

Although not of the same significance as some of the other issues raised in this report, moderators very much appreciate well-organised folders which are easy to navigate. Treasury tags should be used to keep work in order, as individual work which is either sent as a series of loose leaf pages or contained inside plastic wallets can easily become separated during moderation.

Finally, there were, as ever, some centres where arithmetic errors had been made when totalling up the various components. In the worst case this had very seriously disadvantaged the students, who had marks entered on the system which were well below the actual marks given for the work. It is in the best interests of the candidates to ensure that somewhere in the system, an arithmetic check is made to ensure hard earned marks are not lost by administrative error.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx