

Report on the Units

January 2009

1900/MS/R/09J

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

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GCSE English (1900)

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Chief Examiner's Report

Examiners for all units report that, in general, Centres appeared to have entered most candidates appropriately for either Higher or Foundation Tier papers but that, as always at this time of year, there were some who would appear to have been over-ambitious in attempting Higher Tier papers. Overall, the question papers themselves allowed candidates to respond with interest and to achieve results commensurate with their ability. Detailed comments from the Principal Examiners for each unit are to be found elsewhere in this report but the following points of more general interest are relevant to all Centres preparing candidates for future examinations of this Specification:

- Examiners for all units expressed concern about the increased use of 'text speak' in candidates' responses to the writing tasks. This results in a decline in the overall accuracy of expression and in particular is apparent in the failure to discriminate between upper and lower case letters and confusion over the use of the apostrophe. With the likely increased importance of the assessment of Functional Skills in English, it is important that Centres emphasise to all their candidates the necessity for accuracy of expression and punctuation.
- Examiners for both tiers of Unit 1 expressed concern over the number of candidates adopting an inappropriate approach to answering Question 1 in Section A, producing responses more fitted to Question 2 and thus reducing their mark potential.
- Examiners in all units commented on the number of candidates who seem to believe that the process of analysing a piece of text consists of no more than identifying as many literary devices and terms as they can, rather than commenting on their use by the writer. Such an approach is unlikely to score marks higher than Band 5.
- Examiners for both Units 2 and 3 remind candidates that pithy and appropriate quotations from the texts studied are of greater value than lengthy, unfocussed ones.
- The Principal Moderators for both Written and Speaking and Listening coursework report that some Centres are submitting copies of the MS1 forms to moderators on which the individual candidate marks cannot be read. They also express concern that some Centres are failing to meet the deadline dates for submission of marks and are not producing the appropriate documentation when required, thus causing problems for Moderators.

2431/01 Non-fiction, Media and Information

General Comments

Most candidates appeared to enjoy the paper. This may well have been because they were familiar with the subject-matter. However, this familiarity may well have led many, in their answers to both Section A questions, to include points not within the remit of the texts and tasks. They wrote about snowy weather in general and speculated on the causes of accidents and how people keep warm.

All examiners commented on an inexplicably disappointing performance in answers to Question 1 (c). It was common to score a Band 7 mark for Question 1 (c) and a Band 4 mark for Question 2. This shows how well candidates had been prepared for Question 2 but, as they wrote only four or five lines for Question 1 (c), they appeared to treat this with less importance. This approach has not been a feature of candidates' performance in previous examinations, and examiners are at a loss to understand why it occurred in this series.

Examiners noticed that some large centres entered many English as a Second Language candidates. They usually produced lively and intelligent responses to Questions 1 and 2, but not to Question 3. They excelled when dealing with given material, presumably having been well taught, but they struggled to construct essays in an acceptable idiom. Overall, their efforts were highly commendable.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading: Non-fiction

Question 1

(a) From **paragraphs one and two** (lines 1 to 8), write down **two** different ways in which the writer says the cold weather is likely to affect her family.

(b) From **paragraph four** (lines 14 to 19), give **three** facts about past British winters.

These tasks are always an easy lead-in to the paper, and almost all candidates scored maximum marks for 1(a). This was not always so in 1(b), where there was confusion over dates, and where the numbers within the dates were transposed. A number of candidates thought that 'Britain was seriously cold' was a fact. However, in total, no marks for the Question were generally lost because most gave more than the required three facts for 1(b). Candidates who try to use their own words in answers to 1(a) and 1(b) usually express generalisations which miss the specific factual points which are the purpose of these questions.

(c) **From your reading of the passage**, what makes the writer so surprised about the ways the British respond to bad weather?

Use your own words as far as possible, and **do not repeat points** made in 1(a) and 1(b).

This was the least well answered Question, and there were too many very short answers. Sadly, the least successful responses showed that many candidates were capable of identifying only a limited number of relevant points. Centres might like to encourage candidates to add as many relevant points to 1(c) answers as they can see in the passage; this could improve their grade.

Many struggled to incorporate in their answers the dimension of the writer's surprise in conjunction with the identification of the relevant points. This inability to see Britain's response to bad weather from the author's point of view often led to a misunderstanding of the point about

spending money on snowploughs and gritters. This also led to some candidates just repeating what the author wrote about Canada and New York, though better readers did show that they could infer the point of the comparisons. Question 1(c) does not require comments on the author's style of writing, but some candidates give extraneous comments of the kind needed to answer Question 2, even trying to analyse the text by purpose, audience and format.

Reading: Media Text

Question 2

How does the writer persuade you that Britain's response to the snow is 'pathetic'?

In your answer you should write about:

- the **information** the writer selects to persuade you
- the **language** and the **pictures** he chooses.

This was answered successfully across the range of candidates. There was very little misunderstanding, and most now seem to grasp the need to analyse rather than simply describe in this Question.

Candidates seemed to welcome the opportunity to discuss a media text which included statistics, facts, opinions and journalistic techniques. They appear to be, on the whole, well prepared for this Question. It allowed them to show knowledge of the technical features of the text and many were able to identify rhetorical questions, sarcasm, clichés and even, occasionally, irony. A surprising number also clearly wished they had been in a Maths examination, and gave the precise number of schools closed (2275)!

There are, however, many candidates who approach this question with a prepared list of language features to hunt down, determined to use every term they have been taught, often without understanding and regardless of content or question. While comments such as those referring to rhetorical questions could be rewarded when allied to examples and points about the intended effect on readers, unsubstantiated claims could not. Examples of the latter were: 'The writer uses a lot of alliteration', 'His language is all negative', 'It is informal language and the third person', 'He uses the power of three'.

The less successful candidates were unaware of the need to comment upon the effects of words and linguistic devices, and tended to repeat the simpler content and picture points. Indeed, there was a tendency at the lower end of the mark range to describe the pictures rather than comment on their effects, though the more successful could see the significance of the photographs and, most importantly, how they related to the text.

Section B

Writing to Inform, Explain, Describe

Question 3

Which season do you prefer?

Explain what you like about it, and **describe** a scene or event you associate with it.

All candidates seemed to enjoy this essay title and almost all made a good attempt, with very few who were not focussed on the task, or who wrote very little. The Question encouraged candidates to draw on personal experiences and there was no shortage of ideas or remembered moments. The best answers were well structured, with attention to both elements of the task, explaining reasons for a preferred season and also being descriptive with regard to a particular scene or activity.

Summer was undoubtedly the season of first choice, with Winter also gaining keen support, and a few sensitive evocations of Spring-time. The Winter responses fell into a regular pattern: a good season for snowballing, sledging and celebrating Christmas, the New Year and birthdays –

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which often conveniently fell at this time – in the presence of a loving and smiling family. The Summer descriptions and explanations centred on picnics, family outings, water fights and yet more birthdays. Less successful responses were rambling accounts of day trips to the coast or theme parks.

There were a very few charming descriptions of Spring, but for those choosing Summer as their favourite season, there was a dearth of original or fresh description and vocabulary. Almost everyone resorted to superficial descriptions of summers in which the sun was always shining and golden, and there was a blue sky with fluffy clouds, a gentle breeze, green fields and birds twittering. A favourite scene or activity often involved a water fight which took place beside a 'watery, blue swimming pool.' Indeed, in such descriptions, it sometimes seemed that any adjectives would do, even if they did not make sense: '...and there was a hot, gentle, cool breeze.'

The features which characterised better answers were the range of vocabulary used, the control of sentence types and verb forms, and the paragraph structure.

Perhaps it is worth reminding candidates that certain features of writing are likely to improve their performance. For instance, in aiming for a wider vocabulary, every time the words 'got', 'went', 'nice', 'a lot' are used, an opportunity to use a more imaginative word is lost. Connectives such as 'then' and 'so', if over-used, add to the impression of a rambling piece of writing. Colloquial language is an inappropriate register, e.g. 'Going to the park with my mates is like WOW!'

Paragraphing showed an improvement in a mechanical sense, though it is important to make one paragraph lead to another so that material is developed naturally and there is a conscious attempt to engage the reader's interest.

Spelling and punctuation also seem to have improved, though absence of sentence division remains a problem: a few scripts contained no full stops at all.

This particular essay title was very popular with candidates, and as the command word, 'Explain', was placed first, there was not an imbalance of 'Information, Explanation and Description' as has been the case with some previous examinations. However, the emphasis on 'Explanation' did highlight limitations in sentence structure. Narrative and Description tend to be the easiest forms of writing for candidates because most sentences tend to have the subject and a finite, often transitive, verb near the beginning of the structure. Explanation, however, almost always involves an increased use of participial phrases. The effect in this essay was that candidates who produced responses in the middle and lower ranges frequently wrote long strings of participial phrases with no subject or main, finite verb. An example would be: 'I love summer. Sitting in the sun. Eating ice cream. Chilling with friends.'

2431/02 Non-fiction, Media and Information

General Comments

Examiners were pleased to see a slight increase in the number of candidates entered for this series. Examiners were under the impression that by far the majority of these were aiming for a grade C, which meant that there was a concentration of marks around that key boundary. It would appear that, of these candidates, many were re-sitting the examination having been unsuccessful in the previous series; Examiners were of the opinion that many of this particular cohort might well have found the Foundation Tier paper more suited to their ability. There was, however, a significant minority of candidates who produced consistent responses of a high standard and this resulted in a wide range of performance on this paper.

Overall, the paper proved to be appropriate to the tier and most candidates were able to respond to all three tasks; although most managed their time efficiently, there were, however, a larger number than usual who failed to answer all three tasks or who produced answers of inadequate length and detail to at least one task (usually Question 2). This again reinforces the impression that some would have been better suited to the Foundation Tier.

In general, candidates tended to perform more successfully on the writing task in Section B than on the reading tasks in Section A. In particular, a large number of candidates misunderstood the requirements of Question 1 and approached it as if it was a Question 2 task, requiring analysis of content and language. Such mistaken responses inevitably conveyed only a partial understanding of the passage and question with the result that they scored marks in the Band 4 range at best, as they lacked the concision and focus to be placed higher in the mark range. It is incumbent on candidates to read the questions closely and to respond to their instructions rather than having (mistaken) preconceived ideas of what is required of them. In this Paper, Question 1 is always based on the non-fiction passage and requires a summary type response related to the key word *what*; Question 2 is focused on the key word *how* and requires an explanation of how the writer of the media passage attempts to convey her/his purpose.

Examiners continue to express concern about the growing frequency of 'text speak' and text spelling in responses to the writing task; in particular the use of such formations as 'Ino' for 'I know' and an increasingly cavalier (and incorrect) confusion of upper and lower case letters (such as the lower case 'i' for the first person singular pronoun) and a random use of capital letters at the start of some common nouns. Further concerns were expressed about the almost total disappearance of the possessive apostrophe and the almost universal 'Me and my friends' construction. Although the exact requirements for the assessment of Functional Skills in English for the new specifications have not yet been finalised, Centres would be well advised to emphasise the importance of basic grammatical correctness.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading: Non-Fiction

Question 1

Outline concisely Paul Theroux's thoughts and feelings about Benidorm and his journey to Palma.

Use your own words as far as possible.

This task required candidates to read the extract from *The Pillars of Hercules* and to focus their response on the writer's thoughts and feelings. Some of these (such as his view that Benidorm was the worst place he had seen) were straightforward; others, such as his feeling of

puzzlement at the emptiness of the ferry, or his concern about the town's loss of its traditional character, were more implicit and required some use of inference; only a small number of candidates were capable of doing this successfully. A large number of responses very quickly lost sight of the requirement to identify Theroux's thoughts and feelings and, instead, adopted a narrative approach which failed to show that the terms of the question had been understood. For example, many candidates mentioned that he was unable to see the lighthouse at Denia but only a very few made the relevant point that he was *disappointed* that he was unable to see it. Another quite common misunderstanding of the passage was an inability to identify clearly that the journey actually consisted of three stages (the visit to Benidorm itself; the train journey to Denia and the trip on the ferry from Denia to Palma in Majorca). The failure to appreciate these details indicated that many candidates had read the passage with insufficient attention. Similarly, many confused the train and ferry rides, interchanging details from one to the other, and there were also a sizeable number of candidates who failed to mention the writer's thoughts and feelings about the ferry trip completely, thus ignoring half of the question.

There were, however, some very good responses in which the candidates' own words revealed a clear overview of the passage, and the very best successfully synthesised the material into an effectively concise whole. Nevertheless, the majority of answers were long, relying heavily on the wording and the order of the text. There was a good deal of selective lifting and of quotation, sometimes making it difficult to assess exactly what the candidate really understood. One examiner commented that although planning the answer is a key approach to this task, some candidates seemed to have spent far too long doing this, covering a full page with phrases from the text, some relevant, some not. This inevitably led to an over-long response and at times resulted in Question 3 being left unfinished. A small number of candidates somewhat inappropriately wrote their responses in the first person, an approach that meant that concision was difficult to achieve.

Of the 19 points identified in the Mark Scheme, the ones most frequently made by candidates tended to be those related to Theroux's thoughts about Benidorm itself; fewer candidates focused clearly on his feelings once he had left on the train to Denia. A number of points, especially those concerned with his thoughts about the heavy rain storm purging and washing Benidorm away, were made by candidates lifting from or quoting directly from the passage which made it difficult for Examiners to be sure that the points had been clearly understood. The least frequently made point was related to Theroux's concerns that what had once been a quaint traditional smuggler's village has now become a tacky tourist resort divorced from its tradition; many of those who did make reference to this clearly misunderstood the passage and claimed that Benidorm was inhabited by drug smugglers.

Overall, although a large number of candidates revealed only a general understanding of the passage there was little evidence of serious misunderstanding of it; those who produced a focused and detailed summary of Theroux's thoughts and feelings at all stages of his journey were certainly in the minority.

Reading: Media Text

Question 2

How does Giles Tremlett convey his views about the Gran Bali Hotel and its impact on Benidorm?

In your answer, refer to the way he presents his argument and the tone created by the language he uses.

The media passage also was concerned with Benidorm and asked candidates to comment on the way the writer presented his views about one of its newest and largest hotels. Overall, the passage proved accessible to the majority of candidates and a pleasing number attempted to take an analytical approach to the way the writer had used content and language to convey his views about the hotel. The best responses demonstrated an ability to select appropriate

quotes/references and to use them to exemplify and explain the intentions of the writer, showing a sophisticated and perceptive awareness of his tone and attitude in doing so. However, as in previous examinations, a large number of candidates produced less than successful responses, apparently as a result of not fully appreciating the requirements of the task or of approaching the task with firmly held but mistaken preconceptions of what is required. It will help those preparing for similar tasks in future examinations if they bear the following precepts and comments clearly in mind:

- Those choosing the media passages on which the questions are based do not do so with the specific intention of providing candidates with the opportunity to identify as many literary devices and figures of speech as they able to find. Candidates are advised, therefore, not to assume that this task is a test of their knowledge of such terms but rather to consider how particular words, phrases and anecdotes used in the passage help to further the writer's purpose.
- In order to explain the above points successfully, it is important that candidates clearly state their understanding of the writer's view/purpose before they start to explain how it is achieved; they should then select appropriate examples and explain how they further the writer's intention. Statements such as 'this is a simile which draws the readers in and makes them want to read on' are insufficient as a comment unless there is a clear explanation of *why* the readers are drawn in and *how* the particular example makes them want to read on.
- It is of value to refer to specific examples of figures of speech/literary devices only if they are convincing examples of their type and if a valid reason for their use can be identified. Statements such as the phrase 'pies, chips and all-day British breakfasts is an example of the rule of three', simply left Examiners feeling unfulfilled.
- It is not necessary to make descriptive comments detailing the number of paragraphs which the article contains and of the punctuation it contains, nor to make generalised statements such as 'This article was written for the Guardian newspaper which is a newspaper which uses a Berliner format and is read by educated middle aged professional people with a left of centre political bias'.
- The task does not require candidates to summarise the content of the passage; they are required to show understanding of it by linking key passages and vocabulary from it to the writer's purpose.
- General assertions without supporting textual references are insufficient to gain marks in the higher bands. Many candidates stated that Tremlett's article was sarcastic in tone; considerably fewer successfully identified examples of sarcasm, and even fewer then went on to explain how the sarcasm was conveyed and how this furthered the readers' appreciation of the writer's attitude.
- Similarly, many candidates referred to the pun in the article's title, 'Benidorm Gets High and Mighty Ugly' but only a minority gave a clear indication that they fully understood the play on words. (Those who claimed that Benidorm was a centre for narcotics smuggling in their responses to Task 1 tended to assume that the word 'high' firmly reinforced their misconception.)
- There was quite a widespread misunderstanding of the word 'superstructure'; those who assumed that it was an adjective followed by a noun tended to attribute a positive outlook to the writer which the rest of his article quite clearly contradicted.

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- Many candidates confused the new Gran Bali hotel with those referred to in the opening paragraph and failed to distinguish between the quoted views of visitors and/or hoteliers and the author himself.
- Candidates should be cautious of over-reliance on mnemonics such as PEE (point, evidence, explanation) or pre-prepared frameworks; these can prove a liability when employed irrespective of the task in hand and without reference to it.
- Candidates should avoid starting sentences with 'He says/states/describes/believes that' followed by 'quote' and then an opinion on what it means. This is description plus comment, not analysis.
- In writing about the writer's presentation skills, candidates should focus on the use of contrasts and comparisons with examples and different methods of emphasis such as repetition, listing, hyperbole and use of vocabulary for effect. Many go through the text paragraph-by-paragraph rather than identifying individual methods and then providing examples from all parts of the text. Adopting such an approach would go some way towards reducing the proliferation of the 'Then he says' type descriptive writing and focus attention on the required element of how effects are achieved.
- Candidates should remember that the expression of personal opinion, such as agreeing or disagreeing with the author's viewpoint, is not required in this task and will invariably waste valuable time, often leading to a rushed Task 3 response.

However, to balance the reservations expressed above, it should also be emphasised that an encouraging number of candidates did appreciate the writer's attitude to the Gran Bali and were aware from the heading and the opening two paragraphs that the writer thought Benidorm 'tacky' and was mocking the Britishness of the resort. Such responses soon understood that the writer took a negative view of the hotel, referring to it as being yet another ugly skyscraper, 'dubious' and 'garish'. They then went on to discuss the 'sarcastic' tone of the writer with regard to the hotel 'squeezing' in its guests, 'hurtling them backwards and forwards' and how 'fake' everything was.

Other candidates argued that the writer was pretending to offer a balanced view of the hotel by allowing others to make the criticism for him, including the co-owner's dream and determination 'to bring people from all over the world to a 'Mediterranean Las Vegas' (thereby making a tawdry resort even tawdrier) and made mention of the 'glitzy garish' nature of the Bali, its 'concrete oasis' situation and the contrast between being 'spectacular' by night and 'dull' by day. The hotel was frequently referred to as an 'eye saw', 'eye soar' but seldom as an 'eyesore'! Overall, Examiners felt that the passage encouraged an analytical approach of the writer's tone and purpose without candidates having to fall back on isolated technical terms. As a result of a surfeit of Section A responses, one Examiner commented, 'I've cancelled my winter break in Benidorm; Torremolinos sounds much nicer.'

Section B **Writing to Inform, Explain, Describe**

Question 3

A family you know well plans to visit a place with which you are familiar.

Write a letter to one of the family, in which you describe the place and explain what they might or might not enjoy.

Begin your letter 'Dear...'

Candidates had a clear understanding of the requirements of the task and most had a clear awareness of audience. For many, this was the most successful section of the paper and one with which nearly all readily engaged. The best responses noted the family element, weaving the

different tastes seamlessly into an assured response. Description and information were well-balanced and the tone fully appropriate, although the effectiveness of the writing depended partly on how well the location was known to the candidate. Recommended destinations were worldwide, although a number were closer to home: Snowdonia, Scotland, Wales, the Yorkshire Dales, Cornwall and Alton Towers. Many recommended theme parks or water parks as a main attraction. In general, a knowledgeable description and comments on the good and less good features of, for example, Wolverhampton, tended to produce more convincing responses than a generalised and apparently imagined account of the continent of Australia. However, there were a significant number of responses which failed to name their chosen place or identify where it was, which would have made booking a holiday there somewhat difficult!

Some responses were narrative or persuasive, with too little focus on the need for detailed description, support and explanation. These aspects were often only implicit in narrative structures and a significant number of responses lost focus on the task and evolved into accounts of 'what I did on my summer holiday'. In general, attention to the required genre was usually successful, with some apposite focus on family requirements, but there were several responses which, despite adopting an appropriately informal tone, undermined this by concluding their letters with the valediction, 'Yours faithfully'.

The best responses were, as always, a pleasure to read and demonstrated total control and confidence with effective personal/intimate touches, use of humour to accompany both detailed and evocative descriptions, and balanced and useful explanations as demanded.

Spelling, Punctuation and Grammar

Although some Examiners felt that there was evidence of an improvement in paragraphing, most expressed concern about the number of unstructured and unparagraphed responses in their allocations. All agreed, however, that sentence construction, spelling and boundary punctuation were becoming less reliable. Sentences were too often lacking in variety, with very little attempt to use complex constructions. The need to build vocabularies remains an urgent priority, especially for middle ability candidates, whose efforts are circumscribed by an inability to select precise vocabulary for particular effects, leaving them trapped firmly in the world of magazine-speak and dully predictable cliché such as, 'You will love it'. In general, presentation and handwriting were of a satisfactory standard but the increase of 'text speak' was commented on adversely by many Examiners. A further concern, noted by some Examiners, was the increased confusion of 'although' and 'however' which often confused the reader into expecting a concessional clause when none was forthcoming.

In general, Examiners felt that spelling was no better or worse than in previous years, with the most frequently mis-spelt words being 'definitely' (definatly, definetly, deffionatly), 'recommend' (reccomend, recoment), 'restaurants' (restorents, restuarants, restrants), 'accommodation', (acommadation) and, even in otherwise good responses, 'your' for 'you're'.

Examiners expressed concern over the misuse and non-use of the apostrophe. One was of the opinion that candidates appear to have abandoned altogether use of the apostrophe to denote possession and indicate abbreviation, probably because of the increased use of text messaging, but expressed surprise that they seem so determined to use it before the 's' to denote plurals as in 'book's'. As mentioned above, boundary punctuation was not always secure and there were still a few candidates who did not use any stops at all. Those who fell into Band 5 and sometimes Band 6/7 for AO3 iii did so mainly because of insecure boundaries and lack of sentence variety. Internal punctuation is still insecure and there was little evidence of deliberate use of punctuation for effect. Candidates sometimes lost control of over-complex sentences because they become lost in missing second halves of parenthetical commas or dashes or produced incomplete sentences beginning with floating participles. The use of the semi-colon and colon is apparently still not properly understood. Internal punctuation for stylistic effect was sometimes correct, but there was overuse of the exclamation mark thus reducing its

effectiveness, and there was common omission of the question mark from interrogatives and rhetorical questions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, responses to this paper reflected the whole range of ability expected from this Tier. As always, the best work was of a very high standard indeed although, owing to the nature of the candidature with the majority aiming for a grade C, there were fewer high-quality scripts than in the June series. However, nearly all who sat this paper treated it seriously and responded to the tasks conscientiously. The main message for teachers to convey to future candidates is the importance of reading instructions carefully and of being fully aware of the different approaches required by the different tasks in Section A: Question 1 is primarily a summary of the aspects stated in the question, whereas Question 2 requires an explanation of the ways in which writers attempt to influence their readers; as always, the key words relating to these tasks are what and how in that order.

2432/01 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument

General Comments

Overall performances in this examination were consistent with previous January series. However, candidates found Section A more than usually challenging and Section B more than usually accessible. There were very few examples of candidates who were not prepared to take the paper on with a degree of enthusiasm and most appeared determined to do what they could to get their grade C. Nevertheless, the trend of increasing numbers of rubric errors has not abated, with some candidates omitting one section entirely, answering three or more questions on Section A and only one on Section B. There was also a frustrating increase in the numbers of candidates who added on extra bits of answer at the end of the script booklet: this is not a practice to encourage.

There were very few responses to *Things Fall Apart*. Almost all of the answers in Section A fell equally between the short stories of *Opening Worlds* and *The Old Man and the Sea* and almost equally between the two questions.

Section B was one of the most successful to have been set in this specification. A vast majority of responses to Question 7 were instinctively on task, thoughtful and full of unselfconscious personal detail. Candidates relish the 'letter to the close friend' format used in Question 8 and had all sorts of advice on changes of image for their friends, parents and teachers amongst many others. A very few thought that 'image' meant 'photograph' which made for some interesting responses.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading; Texts from Other Cultures and Traditions

Opening Worlds (OCR)

Question 1

How does someone's kindness affect events here and in **one other story** from the list above? (The passage is the conclusion of *The Pieces of Silver*.)

All the responses to this task showed familiarity with the story and talked cogently about the Dovecot family's poverty and their contrasting attitudes to the situation Clement has been put in. Many went on to talk about the kindness of Megahey and the ironies underpinning his behaviour. Fewer actually continued from that point to talk about the passage itself and comment on Clement's kindness to his schoolfellows. The most aptly and frequently chosen second story was 'The Winter Oak' and many responses did significant justice to both the generosity and the common humanity of Savushkin in the forest which lead to Anna Vasilevna's epiphanic experience.

Few candidates made *Leela's Friend* work as successfully: attempts to develop responses to the alleged kindness of either Leela (which foundered on her childish inconsistency) or Sidda (a lot thought he had actually stolen the necklace) made little headway. Better were the responses to the mother and the boys in *The Red Ball*, as well as to Bolan's alleged generosity to the latter which precipitates the climactic moments of the story. There were fewer responses on *The Young Couple* and *Games at Twilight*.

Question 2

How does a change in location affect a character in **two** of the stories from the list above?

Candidates responded to this in almost equal numbers. Most wrote (and a large number very convincingly) about *The Young Couple* and drew fruitful parallels with the happy moments early in the relationship between Naraian and Cathy and their later misery leading to comparisons not only of England to India, but also of the flat/mausoleum to the parents' house.

Many candidates chose to focus on Ravi's experiences in *Games at Twilight* in the shed and immediately after it, which made for good work; others wrote about the Tunapuna/ Port of Spain contrast in *The Red Ball* and some dealt with the contrasts between Clement's home and school experiences.

Although some teachers have expressed the view that they are drying up on the anthology there is scant evidence that students are doing likewise.

The questions on this text elicited clearly differentiated responses across the entire ability range in this tier.

***The Old Man and the Sea* (Hemingway)**

Question 3

How does the writer's description help you understand the hardships of Santiago's life, here and at **one** other moment in the novel?

Responses to the passage were generally strong and selectively supported. There was a lot of sympathy for Santiago's loneliness following the death of his wife. Fewer responses were as robust or substantial on other parts of the novel, however. This was disappointing as there are clear references to Manolin at the outset. What was more common was an account of either or both of his battles with the marlin and the sharks. Only a few responses focused on the closing moments of the story.

Question 4

Why is the marlin so important to Santiago?

As Examiners had hoped, this question got some very direct and, occasionally, very well supported answers. Sadly there were some candidates who confused the marlin with Manolin, which gave some Examiners difficulties. The most popular reason for the great fish's importance was Santiago's perceived need to restore his pride and self-esteem, then to earn some money and alleviate his grinding poverty. A wide range of other reasons were also provided: such as to please Manolin, to be noble, heroic and 'like Di Maggio'.

The questions on this text elicited clearly differentiated responses across the entire ability range in this Tier.

***Things Fall Apart* (Achebe)**

Question 5

What do we learn about the Ibo people from the way they enjoy themselves, here and at **one** other moment in the novel?

and

Question 6

Write about **one** or **two** moments from the novel which show that Okonkwo belongs to the past but not to the future of his people.

Very little work was seen on this text. Even the best candidates found it difficult to do much that was effective, other than to offer a response to Okonkwo and episodes from his career.

Section B
Writing to Analyse, Review, Comment

Question 7

How do you present different images of yourself in different situations, and why do you do so?

The best answers were those that focussed on a simple series of contrasts underpinned by a sense of self and of self-confidence. Candidates compared their behaviour, speech and dress at home, at work (the job interview was a popular scenario), at school (of which the vast majority of candidates were very proud and respectful) and when they were with their mates, either playing sport or socialising. By far the most complex and well informed essay about fashion and make up was written by a boy. There was an almost total denunciation of hoodies and their wearers: and generally of the whole 'chav' culture.

Because the contrasts were so clear and self evident for most candidates, there was a more than usually developed structure to the writing: paragraphs were used well and essays came to neater conclusions. Some candidates gave way to the temptation to write too much, leaving less time for the following question.

There was little, if any, diminution in the amount or frequency of mechanical errors.

Writing to Argue, Persuade, Advise

Question 8

Write a letter advising someone you know how they should change their image.

Begin your letter: Dear...

As mentioned above, this format is a popular one: candidates see the formality of a letter as a status superior to that of the e-mail or the text message – a serious medium for serious advice, which was given in good measure in almost all the responses. The tone was usually kind but firm: "you're my best mate but I'm the only one who can tell you to get a new hairdo/outfit/make up/boy/girl friend/plastic surgery.'

The argue/persuade format held up pretty well throughout the range of what was produced, although there is an increasingly prevalent and irritating habit of inventing absurd statistics to support the case being made: these should be used more credibly or not at all.

As in Question 7, the final shape of these essays was rounder and fuller than in some other series.

2432/02 Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument

General Comments

Examiners were pleased that there was a slight increase in the number of candidates entered for this series. Examiners reported that the performance of candidates on this examination was generally good. Evidence from Examiners indicated that candidates had generally been thoroughly prepared and coped successfully with the demands of the paper.

The time available to candidates in the examination did not appear to affect their ability to offer responses of sufficient length to reward positively. Examiners reported that virtually all candidates made good use of their time in dealing with their three chosen tasks. However, in this series there were more rubric errors, with some candidates attempting to respond to tasks for which there had clearly been no preparation.

The vast majority of centres had decided to use the *Opening Worlds* anthology to prepare candidates. Although this involved working on two texts, responses revealed a genuine grasp of the writers' skill in capturing the unattractive and attractive sides of human nature. Once again, Centres should note that Question 1 no longer requires the candidate to explore both the passage and the rest of the story it is taken from. They must, however, continue to examine a second story from the list specified at the top of the page. Many candidates will feel that further exploration of the text from which the passage is taken is most useful in responding to the task, but the constraints of time makes the study of all three elements (passage, rest of text and second story) demanding.

Question 2 proved less popular, perhaps because the stories do generally reveal some rather unpleasant characters. However, candidates were given the opportunity to select texts that they had personally enjoyed, revealing a genuine understanding of human nature seen at its best. Similarly, good answers came from candidates who attempted Question 1 where they were able to draw upon many characters and situations that reveal us at our worst – the passage from *The Pieces of Silver* providing a powerful starting point – as well as selecting a second story where the human unattractiveness had been effectively communicated. The most popular second text was perhaps inevitably *The Red Ball*; however, all six tales were successfully used in responses to this question.

Questions 3 and 4 were tackled confidently by a smaller number of candidates, the short novel *The Old Man and The Sea* enabling Centres to prepare individuals thoroughly for the demands of the questions. Certainly Question 3 proved the more popular, although the nature of both tasks encouraged the vast majority of candidates to respond with insight and understanding.

Examiners were pleased to note that *Things Fall Apart* had been chosen by a significant number of centres for study. Question 5 was the more popular as it enabled candidates to focus on Okonkwo and his culture. However, those who attempted Question 6 were rewarded with the opportunity to analyse closely a specific section of the novel which clearly identified the cultural strengths of the Ibo people that enabled them to maintain an ordered society. This was clearly useful to candidates given the time constraints of the paper. The very open nature of the tasks produced a wide variety of thoughtful responses.

The performance of candidates on Questions 7 and 8 was generally good. The opportunity to write a letter in which they argued a point of view regarding the politician's suggestion that, 'All students should undertake a year's work in the community after taking GCSEs' produced animated responses, frequently with candidates drawing from recent personal experience.

Interestingly, the majority of candidates were very much against this view, intent upon an unbroken route into further education. Equally, the opportunity to consider how far they were able to balance work and leisure in their lives, which encouraged an examination of what they perceived to be 'work' and 'leisure', produced many engaging responses in which candidates drew upon their immediate circumstances as well as addressing their hopes for a 'balanced' future. Certainly the issue was one that was particularly familiar to them, giving candidates considerable material for discussion regarding their perceptions of how both work and leisure influence the quality of their lives.

However, not for the first time, there was considerable evidence that candidates had been entered for the wrong tier of the examination for this series. Centres are advised once more that they should not risk entering their candidates where performance is likely to fall below what is required for an award at this Tier.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Reading: Texts from Different Cultures and Traditions

Opening Worlds (OCR)

Question 1

*Explore how writers show the unattractive side of human nature, here and in **one other story** from the list above.*

and

Question 2

*Explore how writers show the attractive side of human nature in any **two** of the stories from the list above.*

The most successful related knowledge of the text to the main thrust of the questions and provided coherent, structured and sometimes incisive analysis, characterised by comments referring back to the range of ways in which writers captured the attractive and unattractive sides of human nature, influenced by characters and the situations and relationships they found themselves in, supported by brief, appropriate references. Indeed, examiners felt that a tight focus on the language of the passage in Question 1 produced many excellent responses without candidates having to go beyond the confines of the passage before moving on to their second choice. They certainly grasped the writer's fine portrayal of the acting Head, an individual who, perhaps alarmingly, seemed extraordinarily familiar to them. Certainly they perceived the manipulative cruelty in his 'performance' before the school, as well as the abject humiliation of Clement and his fellow sufferers, candidates drawing heavily on the writer's powerful symbolism. Question 2 provided candidates with the opportunity to examine the opposite side of human nature. They certainly revealed an interesting range of positive individuals who seemed to fit the bill, with Clement and Savushkin by far the most popular. Undoubtedly the very open nature of the task encouraged an examination of some of these favourite individuals.

In the middle range, even when their knowledge of the texts was very sound, candidates sometimes found it difficult to shape what they knew to the needs of the question. Often, what were appropriate and quite sharp insights lost their immediacy because their relevance to the question was left implicit rather than being explicitly stated. Long passages of mere narrative were much in evidence here. Centres need to be advised to impress on their candidates that any comments must be directly related to the question if they are to make the most of their obvious understanding of the texts. Similarly, an imbalance in the quality of analysis between the two stories was a feature of responses which showed promise only to disappoint, particularly with

the second story. Centres would be well advised to encourage candidates to spend their time evenly over the two stories.

At the lower end of the range was a minority of candidates who had clearly struggled to see beyond the mere narrative – indeed they reproduced much of it in their attempts to formulate a relevant response to either task.

Once again examiners were concerned that a few candidates were struggling under the misconception that they would have time to re-read the full texts in the examination and produce a satisfactory answer. Invariably, such responses were very short. Centres need to remind candidates that in an examination situation the text is no more than an aide-memoire to assist with the selection of appropriate references, and that there is insufficient time for any substantial reading.

A further weakness of scripts in the middle and lower ranges was over-long quotation. Candidates should be advised that Examiners are looking for succinct references and are not in the habit of awarding high marks to scripts which pad out an answer with quotations spanning six or seven lines. It is rare that such responses genuinely focus on the task. Examiners were pleased to note that candidates did not select stories for analysis outside the six identified at the top of the Question 1/ Question 2 page. Centres are advised that such responses would inevitably be self penalising.

The Old Man and the Sea (Hemingway)

Question 3

In what ways is this an effective and appropriate ending to the novel?

and

Question 4

Explore how Santiago's thoughts and feelings about the marlin develop in the course of the novel.

The best responses offered a genuine engagement with the text and a keen eye for short, pertinent references to back up comments which were entirely focused on the question. Answers to Question 4 were detailed and perceptive, particularly in dealing with the obvious range of emotions Santiago encounters in his pursuit and catching of the marlin, including his determination, respect and ultimate sadness. Question 3 proved more popular, with candidates successfully focussing in on the tremendous bond between Manolin and Santiago in the passage, combining this with a thoughtful examination of the ways in which the tourists view the remains of the great fish and the pertinence of the closing three lines of the novel. Middle range responses had a clear understanding of the general themes in *The Old Man and the Sea* and were able to provide sufficient textual support for their answers. Some candidates were determined to include their thoughts on the novel generally and there was some bending of ideas to fit the task. Equally, a large number of candidates failed to go very far beyond the passage which was evidently self penalising in a task that clearly invited them to examine how themes in the passage had been central to our understanding of characters and events in the novel. Conversely, a small number of candidates focused almost exclusively on the rest of the novel to the exclusion of so much relevant detail in the passage.

Less successful responses frequently fell into a narrative which was seldom supported by explicit textual reference. Responses at this level were brief or extremely repetitive, failing to convince the Examiner that there was any genuine understanding of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the ending, or indeed Santiago's thoughts and feelings about the marlin.

Things Fall Apart (Achebe)

Question 5

In what ways does Okonkwo reflect his culture, here and elsewhere in the novel?

and

Question 6

In Part One of the novel, how is an ordered society maintained by the Ibo people?

There were many excellent responses to these tasks. The best examined in considerable detail how Okonkwo's words and actions reflect his culture in the passage, as well as examining where they do not. As Obierika so carefully suggests, Okonkwo's violence and aggression are often at odds with the expectations of his people. Candidates did see how prowess in battle was a characteristic to be admired in his culture, but that same demeanour in times of peace would always be problematical. Here there was a genuine engagement with the text through short, pertinent references which were invariably focused on the question. The less popular Question 6 produced some good responses with candidates skilfully examining how an ordered society is maintained by the Ibo people in the first part of the novel, citing how beliefs, rituals, ceremonies, rules, customs, stories and the relationship with the natural and supernatural worlds contributed to that sense of order. Explicit references abounded with short pertinent use of quotations. Middle range responses had a genuine grasp of the themes in this novel but often failed to support their comments with pertinent reference and quotation. These very accessible tasks should have encouraged a very close study of the text where the characters and their culture are so clearly drawn for the reader.

Less successful responses struggled to find useful references in the extract and text. These scripts were almost invariably marked by very superficial analysis that lost focus on either of the tasks. Unsupported narrative was very much in evidence in responses that were frequently very short.

Section B

Writing to Analyse, Review, Comment

Question 7

How far are you able to balance work and leisure in your own life?

The best responses were wide ranging, analytical and thought provoking. Many examined the importance of achieving a balance to maintain physical and emotional health, and how difficult this is with all the demands upon time and effort in this important period in their lives. Certainly peer and family pressure featured strongly in many considerations. Here thoughts were presented in virtually flawless English with a mature range of vocabulary and expression.

Candidates producing scripts at this level invariably introduced a variety of perceptive, personal viewpoints which they interwove with the stimulus material into a logical structure with a clearly identifiable, effective opening and a strong personal summation.

There were many commendable responses to this task, with candidates effectively analysing the impact of home and school environments, so powerful in impacting upon their lives. This was clearly a topic which candidates found relevant and important. Responses in the middle and lower ranges, on the other hand, tended to offer a very superficial examination of how the writers balanced work and leisure which relied heavily on the material provided. Many answers in this range lacked structure. A significant number of candidates appeared to lack knowledge of how to construct an analytical response. Consequently, there was considerable repetition of a few simple points. Such candidates would clearly benefit from help with connectives to rationalise their considerations.

Question 8
Writing to Argue, Persuade, Advise

'All students should undertake a year's work in the community after taking GCSEs,' a politician has suggested in a local newspaper.

Write a letter to the editor of the newspaper arguing your point of view.

Begin your letter: Dear Editor...

High level responses were written in an assured, persuasive tone, frequently marked by a confident use of rhetorical questions and a well judged application of punctuation marks to enliven them. Such responses were very convincing in their address to an audience who were skilfully drawn into the debate. Such work was invariably influenced by cogent argument either for or against the belief that a year's work in the community would be beneficial or detrimental to a person's development. The very best were passionate in their defence of continuing education, or equally convincing in their belief that work in the community would result in more responsible future citizens. Certainly the motivation of the politician in delivering such a statement was brought into question. Unsurprisingly perhaps, some candidates did equate work in the community with punitive 'community service' and felt affronted that they should be treated as 'young offenders'. Interesting images abounded here, including concerns that, 'local parks might not have sufficient litter to support the attentions of thousands of sixteen year old 'litter pickers' descending upon them 'en masse'. Others felt so traumatised by their GCSE experience that they felt that 'a year's rest in the community might be more appropriate!'

The majority found an appropriate tone of address, a rational development of ideas and a powerful conclusion suitable for the purpose of the task.

Responses at middle and lower levels were at ease with the subject matter of the task but frequently failed to convince examiners that their arguments had any persuasive merit. The instructions clearly asked for an address to a particular audience which should have opened up many opportunities for persuasion. However, the least successful responses merely used the task as an opportunity to list the advantages and/or disadvantages of work in the community with no clear articulation of any point of view, with little attempt to persuade the intended audience.

Examiners did feel that this year's task, rather generously, enabled candidates to argue one, or indeed both, points of view. Nevertheless, as always, we advise candidates to strive to follow a line in logical, persuasive argument that does not confuse the intended audience as to their strength of feelings regarding the issue raised, or indeed dilute the power of their argument.

Centres are advised to ensure that candidates are aware that the appropriate tone and form are key indicators to examiners with regard to the award of marks in such tasks.

This task enabled candidates to give a very clear indication of their abilities and examiners noted that a significant majority of responses revealed genuine engagement with the issue of work in the community post GCSEs, together with considerable maturity of thought and expression.

2433/01 and 2433/02 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing

General Comments

Examiners were delighted to see a slight increase in the number of candidates entered for this series and, as a result, they encountered the full range of ability, including some scripts of exceptional quality, and whole centres where the time allocation across the 3 questions was excellent. Evidence suggests that candidates were largely entered for the correct Tier, most Foundation Tier answers reflecting Band 5 qualities and below, or a mixed performance with Band 4 on either the Literature or the writing task, but rarely both. Higher Tier scripts tended to reflect Band 5 and above, although there was a disturbing number of Band 6, even 7 answers in the Higher Tier, especially in Section B. Our impression was that these were often due to an inadequate grasp of examination techniques rather than a lack of understanding of the literary texts, although some candidates clearly struggled with the poetry. It is not recommended to enter for the Higher Tier candidates whose performance can veer below Band 6, as they are then in danger of falling below an E grade, and thus being ungraded on this paper. Success in these units depends on a disciplined approach, a wise allocation of time, and a strict, explicit focus on the question. Very generalised or verbose responses to the Literature tasks, including lengthy introductions, repetitive conclusions, and irrelevant empathic or philosophical reflections are counterproductive.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1

Writing to Explore, Imagine, Entertain

*Copy out the sentence below, and then continue the story, exploring **the thoughts and feelings of the narrator**. (Higher Tier)*

*Copy out the sentence below, and then continue the story.
Show **the thoughts and feelings of the narrator**. (Foundation Tier)*

One look was enough to confirm my worst fears.

In assessing narrative skills across both tiers, Examiners are essentially looking for responses that organise and structure ideas into a coherent piece of writing that communicates clearly, and is convincing and controlled in its development of a chosen genre. Hence, the best responses are expected to use helpful paragraphing and punctuation, choose vocabulary and a range of sentence structures carefully for their effect on the reader, and give an overall impression of confidence and security. Although the build up of suspense can be a means of engaging or entertaining the reader, effectiveness is marred if the result is confusing. Some plots proved too complex, flashbacks too bewildering, switches in and out of stream of consciousness writing too abrupt, or the necessary narrative clues at convenient stages were omitted so that the reader lost track of what was actually happening or was expected to happen. In developing a suitable narrative situation, there is an opportunity for candidates to use their imagination; however, continuations that ventured yet again into haunted houses, blood-thirsty monsters and alien invasions were rarely convincing. Similarly, those who ignored thoughts and feelings to concentrate on an action-packed plot, complete with superman feats, not only failed to signal an appropriate genre but also often lost all credibility. The most successful tended to be those which developed the situation in terms of deathbed scenes, trench warfare scenarios, car, plane, or train accidents, relationship betrayals, encounters with bullies, accidents within the home, or challenging escapades such as climbing or jumping from heights. There were some engaging

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

Foundation Tier accounts of deliberately facing a room full of overlarge spiders in an attempt to overcome a long-held phobia! Appropriate continuations often led on to significant encounters, dramatic accidents, or moments of emotional intensity.

Full credit was given to the development of a strong narrative voice. Thoughts and feelings could relate to past, ongoing or prospective happenings, but they needed to be sustained throughout. Particularly impressive were those who chose to explore moral and psychological repercussions, personal dilemmas, questions of guilt and reasons for joy or unhappiness. Sadly, some of the least successful responses appeared to be prepared essays that bore little or no relationship to the opening sentence given; some bore a remarkable affinity to questions set on previous papers, with hooded figures, long corridors, doors to be opened, or accidents during an aeroplane flight.

The least successful responses lacked overall control, often becoming too chatty, rambling, or over-reliant on dialogue. Technically, this resulted in erratic or non-existent paragraphing, even where there were constant changes of speaker, and a failure to recognise – let alone punctuate correctly – sentence endings. In trying to explore thoughts, some candidates had difficulty in controlling tenses, often switching from present to past and from indirect to direct speech in an effort to produce stream of consciousness writing. While some candidates could adopt this style most effectively, for others it led to choosing basic, rather repetitive vocabulary and sentence structures, and a neglect of narrative detail that would have created some helpful atmosphere for the reader. Other limitations included: too little development (well under 200 words) to demonstrate the ability to sustain an appropriate mood; no sense of direction, so that the ending appeared too abrupt or contradictory to what had gone before; or, conversely, going on to such a length that the quality showed a marked deterioration. Those who produced 4-5 sides, ignoring the recommendation to work on only a section or mini chapter of a story (2-3 sides maximum), not only succeeded in weakening the good impression created by their best sections of writing, but also left themselves seriously short of time to devote to the Literature questions. Many such scripts had to leave out one question altogether, and several produced short, superficial responses, or tackled only one poem.

Reading: Texts from the English Literary Heritage

Shakespeare

In both Tiers, most answers were able to engage with the questions, and demonstrate a sound understanding of the chosen play. Many candidates, however, wasted valuable time explaining laboriously in a lengthy first paragraph what they were intending to do, then repeating this in similar form as a conclusion, without developing the middle section in any real detail. Others, similarly, under-achieved through adopting a wide-sweeping, generalised approach, with little attempt to support their ideas with any detailed reference to the text. While background information on Shakespeare's ideas and beliefs, his time, and audience expectations can be invaluable in enabling the candidate to reach a more perceptive understanding of the play, candidates cannot afford to devote whole paragraphs to this instead of focusing immediately on the demands of the question. Similarly, while genuine engagement or interaction with the play is rewarding, there is neither time nor place in such a tightly timed examination for personal reflection: e.g. 'This makes me glad that I am not prohibited by a family feud from choosing who I wish to marry'.

Much Ado About Nothing

There were no answers on this text from the Foundation Tier. Most Higher Tier candidates showed an impressive knowledge and perceptive understanding of the play. They were well trained to support their answers with regular and apt choice of quotation.

Question 2a

'It is impossible to feel any sympathy for Claudio in Much Ado About Nothing.'
How far do you agree? (Higher Tier)

Most candidates seized the opportunity to give a balanced view of Claudio, showing some insight into the mores of his community and his time as they analysed his behaviour. The best responses drew on a range of incidents and comments from other characters across the whole text, demonstrating a confident grasp of detail and the skill to select essentially what is relevant to the question. Those who could actually draw conclusions from some of the language he used further demonstrated skills of analysis of the highest order.

Question 2b

Is Much Ado About Nothing a good title for this play? (Higher Tier)

Those who wrote on the title of the play were largely able to demonstrate thematic understanding rather than just a straightforward account of how events turn out to be a fuss about nothing. Very few, however, had the courage to suggest that, although all appears to work out well in the end, weaknesses have been exposed in the society that need addressing if true happiness and well-being are to be achieved; even Benedick and Beatrice may not have truly resolved their differences.

Romeo and Juliet

Question 3a

How much sympathy does Shakespeare encourage you to feel for Romeo in the play Romeo and Juliet? (Higher Tier)

Choose **one** or **two** occasions when you feel sympathy for Romeo in the play *Romeo and Juliet*. Explain why you feel sympathy by writing about:

- *the problems Romeo faces*
- *how he deals with them.* (Foundation Tier)

The majority of centres had studied this play and most of the candidates who chose this question demonstrated a sound understanding of key events in the play involving Romeo, each point supported by quotation from different areas of text. However, there was still some confusion between the text and video versions, with police trying to control the feud, gun fights and car chases. There was also a tendency to lose sight of the question and to lapse into narrative mode, although most such responses restored the focus in their conclusion. The best answers, in the Higher Tier, saw the invitation, in the wording 'How much sympathy . . . ?', to produce a balanced response, considering Romeo's arguably immature, self-indulgent lovesick behaviour over Rosaline, his loss of control in killing Tybalt, or his wild, ungrateful behaviour in Friar Lawrence's cell on hearing the news of his banishment, as well as his courage in returning to be with Juliet, his dignified, even generous treatment of Paris, and the strength of his love that prefers death to life without Juliet. Alternatively, strong responses seized the opportunity to show perceptive understanding of some of the relevant thematic issues, for example, in terms of Romeo's predestined role to be the means of healing the feud; hence they explored how Shakespeare encourages sympathy with many references to the doomed 'star-crossed lovers', including dreams and premonitions of death, as well as presenting Romeo as the victim of Fate as seen through the nature of Mercutio's death, the timing and effect of the outbreak of the plague, the timing of Juliet's awakening and the Friar's arrival, and the dramatic irony of his awareness of Juliet's beauty yet his failure to realise she was still alive. Others explored how sympathy is aroused over his role in the battle of good against evil, peace and love against war, light against darkness, exploiting the opportunity to analyse how use of language can encourage sympathy.

The least successful answers tended to give a narrative account of the fight with Tybalt, or Romeo's death scene, forgetting the need to analyse how or why we might feel sympathy, especially when describing his actions as stemming from anger, or revenge, the slaying of Paris given no explanation or extenuating circumstances, and the suicide not seen as too soon or unnecessary.

Foundation Tier candidates who made use of the bullets managed to stay in focus by at least implying reasons for sympathy as they outlined the problems Romeo faced. Less successful responses became more narrative when recounting how he dealt with them. Although Examiners mark positively the candidate's choice of occasion, and welcome the more enthusiastic response that is found when candidates write about a moment or event they have enjoyed studying, those who focussed exclusively on Romeo's heartbreak over Rosaline rarely found enough material to present a convincing case for sympathy, and certainly could not gain credit for showing understanding of the play as a whole and Romeo's role in the tragedy. Similarly the fight only worked when seen in terms of good intentions, confused loyalties, the extreme provocation by Tybalt, and Romeo's sense of guilt at Mercutio's death. Candidates must choose wisely and provide clear reasons. The least successful answers focussed on the two lovers, or even Juliet alone, instead of Romeo. Another serious weakness was to copy out sizable areas of text as a means of making points, without accompanying comment.

Question 3b

Explore some of the ways in which situations and events in Romeo and Juliet remind you of the words of The Prologue to the play. (Higher Tier)

*Write about **one** or **two** moments in the play Romeo and Juliet which remind you of The Prologue's statement that the love of Romeo and Juliet is doomed. (Foundation Tier)*

The key discriminator in this question was the ability to focus explicitly on how and why situations, events, even sayings in the body of the play, reflected and developed concepts introduced in the Prologue. Too many responses treated the question as an invitation to translate the Prologue, giving at best a brief reference to where a statement might be seen in action in the play (for example, 'doth with their death' is seen in the suicide of the lovers) instead of exploring the significance of the event in terms of the Prologue (i.e. in this example, exploring why their deaths were required, and how they were influenced by Fate in terms of timing or coincidence to become inevitable, yet did bring the desired outcome, the hitherto elusive peace to Verona). The best answers were those that truly explored incidents with detailed comments. For example, the first street brawl establishes how violence can erupt out of almost nothing, how it involves all walks of society, how it has already so seriously disturbed the peace that the Prince needs to threaten to use the death penalty to stop further outbreaks, yet how the effect on Tybalt has clearly disappeared by the time the ball takes place. However, there is only time to include detailed comment if the candidate sustains an analytical approach, confident that the Examiner is sufficiently familiar with the play not to need a narrative account of key events/actions; nevertheless, points made must be rooted in the text and supported by close reference and/or apt choice of short snippets of quotation and comment. Quotations running into several lines in length are given little credit, as the Examiner has to identify what is important. Similarly, quotations that merely confirm facts are of limited value (e.g. 'we do exile him' : Romeo is exiled). Compare Romeo's cry 'Then 'banished' is death mis-termed', which also supports the point but leads on to an exploration of the effect on the lovers, and a reminder of their fate. There were many pleasing Foundation Tier responses that showed a straightforward understanding of how the plot illustrated a very special love that was forced by the feud to end in death, bringing shame to the grieving parents. The least successful rarely ventured outside the Prologue.

Poetry pre-1914 or post-1914: Opening Lines (OCR)

Regardless of the Tier entered, to achieve a Band 4 mark, candidates must be able to show a straightforward understanding of the two poems selected, a generally consistent focus on the question, and the beginnings of a response to the poet's use of language/ techniques. Although credit is given for any attempt to analyse language as relevant to the question, answers that fail to show understanding of the ideas/feelings/tone of the poem as a whole are self-limiting. Examiners will accept a wide range of interpretation of feelings/tone provided some support from the text is provided. Although there were some impressive responses, too often Examiners were disappointed by the considerable misunderstanding shown, giving the impression that these poems had not been recently revised, if studied at all during the course, or that candidates had mistakenly turned to Section C (Question 4) war poems when they had been prepared for Section H. Some responses made a valiant attempt to look at structure and other devices, but often lacked the total understanding or confidence required to explain their effect on the reader. Another limitation was to supply several lines of quotation followed by a simplistic 'translation', which showed at best a very basic understanding of the poet's views. Answers offering only one poem had to be penalised. The few who offered all three were usually self-limiting in that there was insufficient time to demonstrate the ability to analyse detail. Although answers were received from sections C, D and H in the Higher Tier, by far the most popular was *Section H: Poetry of the 1914-1918 War (ii)*. For written coursework combining Literature and Language requirements, candidates are required to compare poems. However, in this examination, a comparison is not required, and, although some candidates may find comparing helps them to sustain an analytical approach, the pitfalls were all too obvious for some who were reduced to identifying trivial similarities and differences instead of focusing on the question and analysing a few details in depth.

Section C: War

Question 4

*Discuss some of the ways in which the poets explore feelings about how war changes men who become soldiers, in **two** of the following poems: (Higher Tier)*

*How do the poets use words and images to explore feelings about how war changes men who become soldiers, in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier)*

(page 42)	Hardy	<i>The Man He Killed</i>
(page 43)	Housman	<i>On the Idle Hill</i>
(page 43)	Scott	<i>The Drum</i>

The best responses were normally to Hardy's poem, showing an engagement with the feelings of guilt, and confusion of a soldier after killing a man at close range, and a readiness to explain how the punctuation and broken sentences emphasise his bewilderment and concern about changing from a normally friendly, kindly man into a killer. Misunderstandings included a belief that he shot a man he had met in a pub. The main weakness was a tendency to rephrase rather than to explore the changes in the soldier's attitude to war implied in key phrases such as 'off-hand like' and 'quaint and curious'. Few responses to Housman identified the contrast between the newly recruited soldiers ('Gay the files of scarlet follow'/'lovely lads') and the vast numbers that died; fewer still saw the bitterness in the observer who uses language to present recruitment as having a nightmarish quality, starting with gentle sounds and languid atmosphere, culminating in the 'screaming fife', a metaphor for the changing attitude to war when the recruits encounter its realities. Many candidates clearly enjoyed some aspects of 'The Drum', including the effective use of repetition, but only a few could explain its significance to the poet in terms of the changes in the recruits from enjoying the glamour of the uniform and the adventure of the call to becoming victims of the fighting or themselves perpetrators of the desolation caused by war. Few seized the opportunity to analyse emotive language such as 'mangled', 'ravaged', 'discordant' and 'catalogue of human woes'.

Section D: Town and Country

Question 5

Explore some of the ways in which the poets express strong feelings, in **two** of the following poems: (Higher Tier)

How do the poets use words and images to express strong feelings, in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier)

(page 48)	Tennyson	<i>The Eagle</i>
(page 54)	Hood	<i>The Song of the Shirt</i>
(page 63)	Rossetti	<i>The World</i>

Very few candidates chose this section. Although *The Eagle* is a short poem, there is ample scope to explore how the language inspires feelings of admiration/awe in creating a picture of a majestic, powerful, isolated bird surveying all from such a great height. The shorter the poem, the more important it is to analyse the detail. In contrast, Hood's long poem required only a selection of detail to support the strong feelings of sorrow or pity from the poet, or the feelings of exhaustion, misery, monotony, despair, even grim determination of the Woman. Although most candidates saw the contrasting feelings towards the woman by day and then by night in Rossetti's poem, few related these back to the title, and even fewer picked up details in the language beyond references to 'serpents' and 'monster'.

Section G: How It Looks From Here

Question 6

Discuss some of the ways in which the poets make us question our values and how we look at things, in **two** of the following poems: (Higher Tier)

How do the poets use words and images to make us question the way we look at things, in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier):

(page 95)	Adcock	<i>Things</i>
(page 98)	Dunn	<i>I am a Cameraman</i>
(page 99)	Cope	<i>Engineers' Corner</i>

There were no responses to this question in either Tier apart from one candidate who tried to do every poetry question, regardless of which sections had been studied.

Question 7

Section H: The 1914-1918 War (ii)

Discuss some of the ways in which the poets explore feelings about the death of soldiers in war in **two** of the following poems: (Higher Tier)

How do the poets use words and images to show feelings about the death of soldiers in war, in **two** of the following poems? (Foundation Tier)

(page 103)	Gurney	<i>The Target</i>
(page 108)	McCrae	<i>In Flanders Fields</i>
(page 111)	Brittain	<i>Perhaps—</i>

This was by far the most popular section across both tiers. *The Target* proved the most accessible across both tiers in terms of content and engagement, but, in the Higher Tier, the ability to comment on the effects of the simple language and structure was the true discriminator. Less successful responses tended to summarise the text, still relying on key phrases e.g. 'bloody

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

mess', and 'set her fears at rest' with no attempt to explore the implications. Some thought the speaker was contemplating suicide for his mother's sake. Many responses to McCrea noticed the repetition but failed to appreciate the significance of 'In Flanders Fields'. Similarly, although most commented on the poppies in terms of remembering the dead, only some saw the huge number of dead implied in 'row on row'; most pointed out that the narrative voice was 'the Dead', and their lives had been very short, but few tackled the last stanza, perhaps because, with its exhortation to 'take up our quarrel', it doesn't appear to fit easily into the expected category of an anti-war poem. The response to *Perhaps*— was disappointing, many thinking the speaker was a man, or that there was still hope the soldier would return. Although there were some very honourable exceptions, too many candidates wasted valuable time identifying rhyme schemes and structure without appreciating their effect, or commenting on the use or absence of devices, such as alliteration, personification, similes, and metaphors without explaining how they conveyed the feelings of the woman about the effect on her life of the death of her loved one.

2434 Literary Heritage and Imaginative Writing Written Coursework

General Comments

This year a large number of Centres again submitted coursework in January, indicating that the flexibility of an entry in January and then in June is still popular with a large number of Centres.

Again, it was generally pleasing to see the diligent and conscientious approach of Centres in applying the assessment criteria. Teachers seemed confident in the application of assessment criteria, and the detailed annotated comments on coursework showed the hard work of the majority of teachers in delivering the coursework component.

In terms of general administration, many Centres had submitted marks to Moderators by the allocated deadline of 9th January, but several Centres were over a week late in despatching marks and this led to considerable delays for Moderators in obtaining the relevant folders. These deadline dates have now been unaltered for a number of years, and it is vital for the smooth running of the process that descriptions of procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties.

In the majority of cases the coursework assessment forms were filled in accurately, and detailed teacher comments were helpful to Moderators in establishing what mark had been awarded. Most Centres did show the breakdown of marks for the writing piece, and this made the moderation process much easier.

Some minor points that Centres might like to address in the future are as follows:

- **MS1s:** Many Centres are still sending carbon copies of marks to Moderators that are illegible. These have to be returned to schools for marks to be indicated clearly, before the moderation process can begin. It would be helpful if Centres checked the legibility of mark sheets before despatching them to Moderators.
- **Re-submission of coursework:** a number of Centres were entering candidates for the January examination who had added one more piece of work to their June 2008 entry. It would be helpful if Centres could indicate clearly on the cover sheet which pieces are new work. Some centres even re-submitted the same coursework folder for some candidates along with others that had pieces that were new. This was not always immediately obvious to the Moderator and made the moderation process much more difficult.
- **Plagiarism of material for assignments:** there were a minority of instances when Moderators spotted assignments that had clearly been downloaded either entirely or in part from the Internet but had escaped the notice of the teacher at the Centre. This was taken up with the Centre and appropriate action was taken. However, Centres need to be aware that they have the responsibility for checking students' work and verifying that what they have submitted is their own, unaided work. The Moderator's role is not to check for this practice, but to establish that assessment criteria have been applied consistently.

- Application of assessment criteria: most teachers are now very skilled at applying the assessment criteria accurately, and fewer Centres than ever had mark changes. Most teachers applied the criteria consistently and paid attention to the full range of marks within each band.

AO 3.2 Reading

AO 3.2 (iv) and (v) again proved to be the biggest differentiators. 3.2 (iv) 'selecting material and making cross references', was something only the most able candidates could do.

Response to Shakespeare

The majority of Centres again chose *Romeo and Juliet* or *Macbeth*, but there were also some interesting responses to *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Twelfth Night* and some excellent responses to *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale* and even *Hamlet*.

Candidates seemed generally confident in understanding plot, themes and character, and the more successful responses were able to comment on language and its effect.

Centres demonstrated a varied approach to the interpretation of 'Shakespeare's stagecraft'. Centres are reminded that 'theatricality' is an awareness of the whole play, and candidates who submit detailed responses to specific scenes are often disadvantaged when applying the assessment criteria for higher Bands, if they cannot make some reference to a specific scene in the context of the whole play.

A small number of Centres still submitted tasks that were very broad in context and for some candidates this could lead only to a very general narrative response. Generally, however, an increased number of candidates demonstrated an understanding of language and form, and the range of more challenging tasks which had been set helped to encourage candidates to move away from these more narrative responses.

There was little evidence this time of empathic responses. Centres are again advised that more able candidates who attempt such tasks cannot meet all the assessment criteria necessary to achieve marks in the upper Bands.

It was encouraging to see many examples of challenging and exciting tasks, and teachers are to be congratulated for the wide range of stimuli that they have clearly developed to make the coursework unit on Shakespeare as interesting and demanding as they have.

Interestingly, this time, there was a limited return of the 'bulk' folder and there were some centres where candidates were submitting essays in response to Shakespeare that were over 40 sides in length. Some teachers had still clearly felt that they should reward quantity rather than quality.

Response to poetry

Again, as in June, 3.2, (v) was the greatest differentiator. Candidates are still showing their expertise in identifying structural and presentational devices but cannot always then go on to show their effects upon the reader.

Most Centres are now only comparing two poems. The most popular comparisons were again of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* and *Dulce et Decorum est*, of love poetry, or of Blake's *London* and Wordsworth's *Westminster Bridge*.

Generally, Centres are to be congratulated for the stimulating and challenging responses that they have enabled candidates to achieve. Some of the best responses were from candidates

who had clearly been able to comment critically on both structure and effect, and showed appreciation of the function of form and language in a way that was personal and enriching for the reader.

AO3.3 Writing

Again, it was encouraging to see the diversity of responses, with some candidates clearly relishing the opportunity to display their creative talents. Centres seem to have encouraged more candidates to be aware that quality of response is not always dependent on length. As a result there were fewer lengthy mini novels and more succinct, sharper pieces.

It was pleasing to report the diversity of original responses, ranging from short stories in the gothic genre to a day in the life of a school bag! Increasingly Centres are enabling students to write with engagement and originality and with this entry there was very little sign of 'The Assassin'.

Overall, Centres are to be congratulated for their generally consistent application of the assessment criteria in relation to a range of interesting and demanding tasks. It would seem that more and more Centres have embedded effective teaching of course-work into their long term planning at Key Stage 4, and there is extensive evidence of effective implementation of assessment criteria and internal standardisation. Teachers are to be complimented for their hard work in providing practical and supportive feedback in their detailed annotation of students' work, and for their dedication in making the coursework component an interesting and challenging element of the GCSE course.

2435 Speaking and Listening Coursework

General Comments

The trend continued from the previous January series, with a number of Centres entering an entire cohort of candidates, rather than just seeing this series as a 're-sit' session. However, for many Centres, the January series is still treated as an opportunity for candidates to improve on their June result, often working in remodelled groups and on different activities.

Task setting

The activities covered by many of the January candidates crossed over with their Sixth Form studies, giving a relevance and immediacy to their performances; this often resulted in a marked improvement in achievement. There was evidence, therefore, of a range and variety of appropriate activities having been undertaken, many of them based on non-literary material. Often, the added boost came from developed confidence drawn from a more sympathetic and responsive audience. Extra maturity resulted in an ability to analyse and reflect on experience and handle challenging material, synthesise complex items, organise points and challenge assumptions. Comments from Centres on performance often highlighted added skills in sensitive and sympathetic listening as a factor in improvement and a willingness to encourage quieter members to participate and then build on their contributions.

The drama-focussed context was often the most successful. Candidates, having been through the process, seemed to be clearer about what was required, and more skilled in adopting and sustaining a role realistically and convincingly.

As we are well into the life of this specification, it is easy to become complacent and not revisit or question the practice of previous years. This seems to have become a feature of task setting. The specification allows for the selection of the final activities for assessment from a number of tasks, given the fulfilment of the basic requirements, but some Centres seem to be treating this unit in a similar way to coursework for Reading and Writing. Good practice is rather to build up a profile of a candidate over the whole course, covering a number and range of tasks and then select the final three for assessment on a more individual basis. In adopting a 'one choice fits all' approach, Centres may be disadvantaging their candidates.

This last point underlines the advice to Centres, to teach the skills needed for this component and to give candidates opportunities to develop and hone their skills. Many Centres now refer to Speaking and Listening as an integral part of Key Stage 3 work, feeding into Key Stage 4.

Record keeping

A key part of the process is record keeping. The majority of Centres maintain careful, thorough and clearly presented records, with a detailed and informative picture of progress achieved during the course; teachers' judgements are criteria-referenced and marks accurately awarded, both for the separate activities and for the final mark. A standard format for record keeping places the process within a systematic framework and ensures that all the required information is supplied to the Moderator. The vast majority of Centres used the OCR form, designed to cover all the necessary elements. It is a Centre's responsibility to ensure that Moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records; this unfortunately is not always the case and much time is wasted by the Moderator as a result.

The Application of the Criteria

Centres continue to display confidence and competence in assessing their candidates. Here good practice in awarding the final mark includes balancing strengths and weaknesses, not just recording strengths. An explanation is given as to why candidates have failed to achieve the next band. This aspect of the application of the criteria is particularly important as it allows Moderators to distinguish performance where there is bunching of marks.

Internal standardisation procedures

These continue to be secure and in many instances, rigorous and thorough, using cross moderation of groups, joint marking, reorganising of groups for assessments and departmental Inset using filmed evidence. Attention, therefore, is drawn to the Inter-Board Training and Guidance DVDs and videos, which should be used by Centres to confirm their own internally-set standards. This material provides vital support for small Centres and for teachers working in isolation. With the recently issued latest DVD, Centres now have a bank of support and guidance material to draw on.

Administration

As regards the administration of this unit, the majority of Centres were problem-free, but there was a sizeable minority where all the relevant paperwork was not in place by the published deadline; these deadline dates have now been unaltered for a number of years, and it is vital for the smooth running of the process that descriptions of procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties. In this series the moderation process was protracted unduly by Centres waiting for Moderators to select the sample and not having records and forms ready for a prompt dispatch.

Grateful acknowledgement is made to those Centres where co-operation in assembling and checking the documentation enabled Moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

This unit continues to be a success and is often a real strength for candidates. All this is a testimony to the hard work and dedication of the teachers involved in preparing their students; we thank those teachers, as always, for their continuing commitment.

Grade Thresholds

General Certificate of Secondary Education
English (Specification Code 1900)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
2431/1	Raw	63				52	44	37	30	23	0
	UMS	62				54	45	36	27	18	0
2431/2	Raw	90	72	67	61	56	50	47			0
	UMS	90	81	72	63	54	45	41			0
2432/1	Raw	63				57	49	42	35	28	0
	UMS	62				54	45	36	27	18	0
2432/2	Raw	90	78	71	63	56	48	44			0
	UMS	90	81	72	63	54	45	41			0
2433/1	Raw	41				34	28	23	18	13	0
	UMS	41				36	30	24	18	12	0
2433/2	Raw	60	52	46	40	34	28	25			0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	27			0
2434	Raw	40	38	34	29	24	18	13	8	3	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0
2435	Raw	40	37	33	27	21	16	11	7	3	0
	UMS	60	54	48	42	36	30	24	18	12	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (i.e. after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
1900	300	270	240	210	180	150	120	90	60	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U	Total No. of Cands
	3.4	10.2	21.9	52.4	83.2	93.9	98.6	99.6	100.0	4700

4700 candidates were entered for aggregation this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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