GCSE

English and English Language

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J350**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J355**

OCR Report to Centres

November 2013

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

English (J350)

English Language (J355)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

A641 Reading Literary Texts

General comments

In this session, there were fewer entries than originally anticipated, and were mainly of retake candidates leading to bunching of marks in bands 3 and 4. Centres continued to take up the option to use themed tasks, mainly with a set text such as *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet* or Owen, but sometimes with texts of their own choice such as *Macbeth.*

It was pleasing to see that, at this stage in the specification, very few centres had entered forbidden combinations; where this was the case, it was usually of Steinbeck with either Duffy or Zephaniah. Centres must be clear that the requirement is to select **one** text from Different Cultures/Contemporary and **one** from Literary Heritage and these must be taken from the poetry and prose and **not** Shakespeare. Choosing *Of Mice and Men, Tsotsi, Notes from a Small Island* or *The Kindness of Strangers* means that the poetry must be Owen unless the centre opts for the themed task with their own choice of Literary Heritage poet; choosing to enter for Duffy or Zephaniah would require the set prose text to be either *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales.*

Having been given permission for this series, some centres had entered tasks for 2014, but it must be strongly emphasised that the correct tasks must be submitted for 2014, both in June and November, and this is a requirement from Ofqual that OCR cannot change.

Candidates were well prepared, and the quality of the responses was generally consistent across all three genres. In some folders, there was, however, evidence of development of skills over time. The best candidates had a full and clear engagement with the works, gave well-chosen references with good analysis and evaluation, using relevant contextual elements to develop and illustrate the writers', and their own, ideas. A few responses repeated the same range of quotations, and the same contextual ideas in a very similar essay structure. The candidate's own personal approach and engagement to the texts and the questions is to be encouraged wherever possible. Where notes were included with the work as was evident with some candidates, these were very helpful in seeing how the final task had been produced.

The ability to explore the effects of language, especially in poetry essays, as opposed to either explaining the meaning or give a general statement such as "This makes the reader feel sympathy" or "This shows that Owen was bitter about war" signals the candidate appreciating how language works and often signals a move into band 4. Below this level, candidates often resorted to narrative and straightforward explanation of the meaning of quotations and this generally indicates performance at band 5 and below.

In awarding band 3 and above, the focus on the writer needs to go beyond merely naming him/her and must show an awareness of the writer's intentions, closely supported by an analysis of the techniques employed and their effects, becoming more perceptive and sophisticated for bands 1 and 2 where work of this level was entered. Centres were more discriminating in their assessment of candidates' response to language, being less likely to refer to "analysis" in relation to anything in the responses that involved language and close reading.

As was evident in June, the social and historical context of texts was addressed more effectively than in the first year of this specification and there was less of a tendency to begin with the seemingly obligatory biography of the writer or the conditions at the time of writing. Centres responded to the advice in the June entry this year to focus on key words in the questions, notably **How, ways in which** and **How far** which have helped to encourage an analytical rather than descriptive response.

Moderators would appreciate responses to be clearly headed with the candidates' names and numbers together with details of the tasks and the cover sheet attaching. Cover sheets do need to be filled in with summative comments. Evidence of internal standardisation is very helpful and it has been noticed that centres with procedures in place for this process are generally within marking tolerance.

Question specific comments

THEMED TASKS

How does the writer make the setting important in a text you have studied?

In exploring *Of Mice and Men,* many candidates described the setting(s) and talked about loneliness, The American Dream and the Depression period, as well as the male-orientated culture of life on the ranch. .Higher level responses appreciated the impact of these "settings" on the lives of characters and the novel overall.

Responses to Owen either referred to the natural world setting, making them very similar to the set task, or explored more broadly the WW1 setting of the poems and the ways in which Owen describes the front line and its effects on the soldiers. One centre responded to *Macbeth.*

The best responses moved beyond simply explaining the setting and analysed how it is made important to the text**,** with some good studies of its social/symbolic aspects however, for some candidates, the term "setting" was not clearly understood and they simply wrote about characters' situations and what they said and did.

Explore how the writer shows the unappealing side of human nature in a text you have studied.

Various types of undesirable or unappealing behaviours were discussed and evaluated and arranged in some sort of rank order, with appropriate support. Higher level responses were well referenced whereas less developed ones were more generalised and less precise.
Whilst this task was used for *Of Mice and Men,* with some effective evaluation of specific characters, often related effectively to the harshness of ranch life, it also prompted responses to the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, Tybalt and Lord Capulet as the most popular choices from *Romeo and Juliet,* and Antonio and Shylock and other chosen characters from *The Merchant of Venice.* In general, candidates were very able to identify unappealing characters in the text, describe them and illustrate how they had unappealing sides.

PROSE OR LITERARY NON-FICTION

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

"Maybe ever'body in the whole damn world is scared of each other." Starting with the first encounter between Curley, George and Lennie in Section 2, explore how far Steinbeck persuades you to agree with Slim's comment.

This set task was used more often than in June 13, although centres also made use of the themed tasks in responding to this text. There were some secure responses which evaluated different types of fear, for example of bullying, discrimination, insecurity, etc., with appropriate support. The initial episode referred to in the question provides the opportunity for close analysis of the fear and tension created, which sets the tone for George and Lennie's experiences on the ranch, however some responses ignored this prompt in the question.

The very best responses used the prompt of "How far" which should enable candidates to think about relationships which do not demonstrate the same level of fear and aggression, such as that of George and Lennie, although it may be argued that at times Lennie is fearful of George's reaction. Responses drew effectively on the social context, referring to the impact of the isolation, harshness of ranch life and destruction of dreams on the characters and their relationships.

Tsotsi by Athol Fugard

Starting with Chapter 6, explore how Fugard builds up a sense of fear and tension in the novel.

It was disappointing to see that only a very few candidates opted to answer on this text this session, however those that did responded effectively to the language and made effective analysis of Chapter 6 and their own choice of other key moments.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

How does Austen show the importance of social status to one or two characters in the novel?

The candidates who responded to this text clearly enjoyed exploring characters such as Lady Catherine, Mr Collins, Darcy and the Bingley sisters, recognising how the importance of social status not only affected the ways in which these characters behaved – making them an object of ridicule in some cases – but how they impacted on the lives of others.

The Withered Arm and other Wessex Tales by Thomas Hardy

How does Hardy encourage you to feel sympathy for one or two characters in this selection of stories?

The title story from this collection and *The Son's Veto* proved to be the usual choices for the responses made to Hardy and candidates clearly engaged with characters' situations and their often unfair treatment at the hands of others. The impact of social context was used effectively to develop reasons for feeling sympathy.

Notes from a Small Island by Bill Bryson

How does Bryson reveal his attitude to some of the tourist attractions and heritage sites he visits?

Candidates who chose this text showed appreciation of the ways in which Bryson's attitude is revealed, engaging with the humour and the language used through some apt selection of key moments.

There were no responses to *The Kindness of Strangers* in this session.

DRAMA: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Romeo and Juliet

How does Shakespeare show the importance of anger to the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*?

There was some effective exploration of different characters, most notably Tybalt and Lord Capulet, the violence and aggression created by the feud and – in the higher band responses – appreciation not only of how these contribute to the tragedy but to the tone of the play through the language and structure.

Lower band responses tended to be rather characterised by a more mechanical description of who is angry and why, starting with the thumb biting at the beginning and working through the play with references used in a simple way to support what is said and done; the capacity to provide an overview characterised stronger responses.

The background of the feud and the context of the play were often used well to show the impact of anger, but the" importance to the tragedy" proved to be more challenging.   Surprisingly, not one candidate wrote about the death of Paris at the hands of Romeo in the Capulet crypt. The best responses engaged closely with the drama showing a clear understanding of the impact of stage directions.

Julius Caesar

How far does Shakespeare encourage you to admire Brutus?

There were a few responses to Brutus which were well developed, taking the opportunity to provide a balanced argument carefully supported with textual evidence. The social and literary context informed these essays, with understanding of the importance of honour and reputation as well as the nature of tragedy. The prompt "How far" enabled the strongest responses to interpret and appreciate how Shakespeare encourages them to see some complexity in the presentation of Brutus.

POETRY: SELECTED POEMS

Wilfred Owen

Explore some of the ways in which Owen presents the natural world in his poems.

This question prompted some thoughtful evaluation of the language and the ways in which the natural world is used by Owen to explore the impact of war on the soldiers. For many candidates this was their best response and they were able to engage with the language, poetic techniques, and support with close detail to the language. It was a pleasure to see most candidates show understanding of the devices rather than just listing them and the social, cultural and historical strand was more easily embedded in responses here.

Benjamin Zephaniah

How does Zephaniah show his feelings towards powerful British institutions in his poems?

Candidates showed some engagement with the tone adopted by Zephaniah and the language used to create it, with *Chant of a Homesick Nigga, Three Black Males* and *Biko the Greatness* being, as in January, popular choices. Candidates clearly appreciate the opportunity to discuss the social context and the injustice evident through the poetry, however it was too easy for some weaker candidates to go off task and rant about Zephaniah's criticism of racism.

Carol Ann Duffy

Explore some of the ways in which Duffy challenges stereotypical views of women in her poems.

As with Zephaniah, lower band essays tended to be caught up in a rant, in this case, about stereotypical views of women and be less focussed on the language ("ways in which") than in all level ones relating to Owen. The best, however, showed qualities of interpretation and analysis of language.

How does Zephaniah show his feelings towards powerful British institutions in his poems?

A642 Imaginative Writing

General Comments

It is clear that candidates had, in most cases, been well prepared for their controlled assessment tasks. They engaged enthusiastically with the tasks and many produced entertaining and original pieces of work. Despite the pressures faced by centres at this time of year almost all of them submitted their sample on time and completed the relevant documents accurately. There were, however, a few clerical errors in transcribing marks from the work itself to the front-sheet and to the MS1; such errors may lead to a delay in issuing results for candidates.

To support OCR in tracking work submitted by centre it would be helpful if work for A642 was sent in a separate parcel from work submitted for A641 even though they are going to the same moderator. Centres should use tags or staples to attach work together rather than plastic envelopes or cardboard folders as this slows the moderation process. Centres must give a clear breakdown on the cover sheet of the marks awarded for AO3i and ii on the one hand and AO3iii on the other. The indication of errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar in the body of the text also supports the moderator in understanding the AOiii mark awarded.

Many centres drew on the assessment criteria for the summative comment on the cover sheet but adapted them to reflect each candidate's individual achievement. Too few centres, however, annotated the body of each candidate's work to draw the moderator's attention to particular strengths. This usually helps the moderator to understand how the final mark has been awarded and often enables them to support the centre's judgement.

The assessment of the candidates' work was, by and large, very accurate, with the band descriptors being used and clearly understood. Where centres were not in line with national standards they were often too generous in their mark for AO3i and ii and too harsh in their marks for AO3iii. A few centres provided clear evidence of an internal standardisation procedure; such evidence gives moderators greater confidence in the mark awarded and may again allow them to support the centre's judgement.

The Tasks

In some cases there was confusion about task setting. Some candidates had completed tasks for 2014 rather than tasks for 2013 which made moderation difficult. There also some instances of candidates completing two of the satellite tasks rather than the main task and one of the satellite tasks. In future sessions such infringements of the rubrics for this unit may result in candidates not receiving a result for the work submitted. Centres are reminded that they can refer to the Controlled Assessment Consultancy if they are in any doubt.

There were examples seen by the moderators of candidates attempting all the tasks with equal success. In some cases, however, the response to the satellite task was much shorter and much less successful. Each piece is marked separately and the two marks averaged to arrive at the final mark so centres should consider ways in which to help candidates achieve equal success in both pieces.

Media

Write a script for a broadcast which explores how a group of young people is affected by a particular problem.

Most candidates seemed to find the tasks engaging with the "script for a broadcast" being interpreted as a playscript as well as a documentary. Candidates responded imaginatively to this task, covering a wide range of problems such as drugs, alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, self-harming, peer pressure and the baleful influence of the internet. The best showed understanding of the language and format of broadcasts, some clearly having benefited from using this task as a role play and or real life scenario for Speaking and Listening.

There were many good scripts with genre features in place. Often candidates were able to differentiate the voice and style of each speaker. Structure was often a good feature with appropriate openings and endings. Weaker candidates, however, produced thin pieces which lacked variety in syntax and vocabulary and had less sense of form or genre. There were fewer links between speakers and the effect was choppy and disjointed.

Write a letter to the producers commenting on the broadcast and giving your own views.

This was a popular choice for candidates, perhaps because the letter format helped candidates to organise their ideas clearly. It also gave them an opportunity to adopt a formal style in contrast to the conversational style often used in the broadcast piece. There were fewer candidates than in previous sessions who repeated material from the core piece and many took the opportunity to explore an alternative point of view. In general candidates were able to adopt a relevant persona, write sympathetically about the people who had been involved in the broadcast and share some imaginary personal anecdotes. Like most of the linked tasks there was a greater sense of the need to relate to the core task than in previous sessions.

Write a monologue in prose or poetry exploring your thoughts and feelings about the problem explored in the broadcast.

This was also a popular alternative which was often successful. Candidates tended to rely less on the original broadcast and present instead an account of a particular person's experience creating voices that were often vivid and engaging. There were far fewer of these but some interesting stream of consciousness approaches in a confessional style. Some candidates had difficulty in sustaining an appropriate voice and point of view. Where candidates attempted poetry there were some successes but many would have benefited from clearer guidance on how to structure their ideas more effectively.

Write the words of a leaflet offering advice to young people on an issue that affects their lives.

Leaflets were a minority choice but the best used the format effectively and adopted an appropriate tone and style for a particular audience. Most centres were clearly aware that material for texts like leaflets can be lifted from internet sites and ensured that candidates used their own words to present their material.

Text Development

Imagine one or two characters from a text you have read, heard or seen find themselves in a different setting. Write about what happens.

Set texts used in A641 featured heavily in this section, particularly *Of Mice and Men/Romeo and Juliet* although some candidates mixed these with characters from their own reading or TV dramas. Lennie and Romeo were popular choices appearing in various new and outrageous situations. Candidates should not assume, however, that the character they have chosen is well

known and so they must establish the character within the context of their own story and avoid repeating details from the original text.

Summative comments and annotation suggested that candidates were sometimes rewarded for the way they had integrated detail from the original texts. Centres are reminded that this is a writing assessment not a reading assessment and that a character called Lennie may not actually resemble the character from the novel, despite sharing his name, but could still feature in a very successful response to the task.

Write the words of a radio advert to persuade people to visit the setting you have described in your story.

This was the least popular of the satellite tasks but was usually completed successfully by those who attempted it. Writing to persuade allowed candidates to use the many techniques they had learned to advertise the setting effectively. Although these pieces were often quite short they usually included sufficient detail and demonstrated sufficient skill to achieve a grade similar to the core task.

Imagine you visit the setting you have used in your story. Write a detailed description of this setting, either in prose or poetry, expressing your thoughts and feelings about it.

There were a few descriptions of the setting of the story which gave a strong sense of place and used imagery and a range of vocabulary to not only describe the setting, but to create mood and atmosphere. In most cases this was the satellite task of choice. Not all addressed the second part of the question by expressing their thoughts and feelings about it but the best managed to incorporate this aspect implicitly by their careful choice of language.

Write a feature article for a newspaper or magazine set after the events of your story in which someone is interviewed about what happened. The interviewee may or may not be a character from your story.

This was also less popular than the description but was often very effective. There was some tendency in weaker answers simply to repeat the material from the core task with little adaptation to newspaper style or format. These answers often retold the story quite well but did not always engage with the main part of the task which was the interview with a character. The newspaper format was quite supportive and it was pleasing to see that few candidates were distracted from writing a substantial text by a desire to make their piece look like a newspaper.

Overall

Overall moderators reported enjoyment of the imaginative ways in which most candidates, at all levels of ability, engaged with these tasks. The work of most candidates was well presented and mainly accurate but illegible work sometimes made moderation difficult. Where candidates have handwriting that is hard to read centres are reminded that no special permission is required to use a word processor to complete the work as long as electronic aids such as thesauruses are switched off. A few centres produced very similar pieces, and with a very similar essay structure. The candidate's own personal approach to the questions is to be encouraged wherever possible. There were in fact a number of centres which had clearly encouraged a personal response, which was presented in a refreshing and intelligent manner.

Although a range of accuracy is expected according to candidates' levels of attainment there were persistent errors in even the most able candidates' work. The most common errors are in punctuation, particularly the use of the comma splice between questions and the punctuation of speech. There also seems to be some carelessness about the accurate use of capital letters.

The folders gaining fewer marks were thinly developed, and had quite a sustained range of AO3iii error throughout. Dialogue was often very poorly managed, and there were some very brief responses. Better candidates did develop some personal engagement with the tasks, and created lively character work, or set the scene very effectively. There had been some effective research done on the format of leaflets, and looking at social issues, and there was often credible analysis of the problems facing young people. The best candidates had a full and clear personal engagement with the tasks, presented accurate and structured pieces, with some ambitious and well-chosen vocabulary. Good pieces had a clear view of audience, purpose and genre.

A643/A652A Speaking and Listening

General Comments

The entry for both units was reasonably large for a November session, with this session offering the last opportunity for Speaking and Listening to count towards the final GCSE grade.

For this series, responding to feedback from centres, as with January and June 2013, one moderator was responsible for all three components: A643/A652 Section A and A652 Section B, to reduce the number of separate moderators, with whom centres had to deal.

The Training and Guidance filmed footage, to support centres this academic year, was issued online to enable all teachers preparing candidates, to access the material for assessment purposes, task setting and administration. As with the previously issued footage, there was a complete range of activities across all three contexts, but which gave specific support to the "real-life" context and task setting for the drama-focussed context. Two areas identified as being problematic for some centres.

Advisory visits to centres have been profitable, with centres responding to the requirement, in the main, in a positive and professional manner, working happily with the criteria and acting upon the advice given.

Task setting

Centres are experienced in task setting to cover the requirements of the three different contexts. It was clear that some departments and individual teachers had put a great deal of thought into designing tasks, which would allow achievement across the ability range, and into providing opportunities for candidates to succeed.

Task setting is crucial in determining successful outcomes for this component, and centres are always advised to set tasks, which allow the assessment criteria to be met, and are engaging and relevant for the candidates. However centres must be made aware of the fact that tasks can be limiting, by their very nature. Giving candidates the freedom to choose for example the subject matter of a presentation for the Individual Extended Contribution, without guidance may lead to underperformance. So using examples from this series, a presentation on "How soldiers are treated when they return from war" allows achievement in the higher band; a talk on "Football", with no specific focus, does not.

However more worryingly, the requirement of the "real-life context in and beyond the classroom" is still proving problematic for some centres, despite being now well into the life of this specification. With the detailed advice and examples offered on the OCR filmed footage, the requirement that one of the basic three contexts must address this aspect should not be onerous or difficult to comprehend. The repeated advice to centres is that it is not just a matter of subject matter, but rather it is a question of role, purpose and audience, which extends the performance "beyond the classroom". So a straightforward talk to the class, regardless of the subject matter does not meet this requirement. It does not alter the validity by calling it "a formal talk" or "a conference talk", if the presentation is still to the rest of the class and if they do not assume 'real-life' roles. So a talk on work experience is no different to one say on fishing; both are straightforward talks to the rest of the class. Similarly deciding, "Who is to blame for Lennie's death?" set in a mock court scene, with candidates in role as characters from the novel can never be classed as "real-life".

However many centres have embraced the "real-life" context with enthusiasm and likewise their candidates, seeing it as an opportunity to extend and demonstrate their skills. Many centres are

choosing to do tasks defined as fulfilling the real-life context featured on the OCR filmed footage, which seems a sensible option where there is any uncertainty.

Similarly problematic for some centres is the drama-focussed context. Increasingly centres seem to assume that drama-focussed means that the stimulus material must be drama text based. Speaking and Listening requirements seem to get confused with those for Drama as a discrete subject. So techniques appropriate to Drama, for example freeze frames, are not appropriate for this component, where the emphasis is always on Speaking and Listening.

Performing an extract from a drama text does not allow candidates to create and develop independent characters of their own. Thus, performing a scene verbatim from a play, usually the set Shakespeare play, without any adaptation, does not allow candidates the opportunity to meet the assessment criteria.

The extra scene or speech is often a popular valid activity, but care must be taken not to stretch the bounds of credibility or set inappropriate tasks, which do not allow candidates to achieve their potential. Hot seating Lennie from "Of Mice and Men" would be one such task, with limited verbal responses possible. Indeed if a candidate takes on a role from a literary text they need to adapt their language accordingly, making the task more challenging.

The number of centres which link Speaking and Listening activities with the work for the A652B Spoken Language study remains surprisingly small. Successful group tasks linked to studies of the language of 'The Apprentice' featured in some assessments. It is an opportunity missed to support candidates in preparing for their controlled assessment task for Spoken Language.

Reference has been made to the support available as regards task setting for all aspects of Speaking and Listening. The tasks illustrated on the two DVDs issued and online filmed footage are all valid to be used together with the commentaries and a guidance document available on the OCR website, specifically for the "real-life" context. The Controlled Assessment Consultancy is always available to centres seeking further advice on individual tasks and through this a centre's tasks may be validated. Centres with previous entries will have had direct feedback regarding task setting and task setting is always a major aspect of Advisory visits by external moderators.

Record keeping

A key part of the process is record keeping. Centres are advised to maintain on-going records for all candidates, perhaps making use of a centrally held data base of marks for candidates, with written comments. These procedures, good practice in centres, help to prevent problems arising from staff absences or changes of staff. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used to form the basis for assessment. Good practice continues to be multiple opportunities, with the final selection being on an individual basis.

Many centres have their own working records, which contain feedback to candidates and candidate involvement in the process. Final submission for assessment is then on the OCR Controlled Assessment form for Speaking and Listening, which covers all the necessary elements required by the external moderator.

Centres must remember that candidates' record sheets form a vital piece of evidence in the moderation process. If there is a lack of detail in the description of activities or when comments on performance have been "lifted" directly from the band descriptors with little or no linkage to individual candidate achievement, it is extremely difficult to carry out the moderation of a centre. Worryingly some centres were asked to re-submit records with the necessary range and detail of comment in order for moderation to take place. Typical lack of detail in description would be "a talk to the class" or "a group discussion on the poetry" or "court scene "Romeo and Juliet"". The level of challenge or complexity involved cannot be judged without the specific subject matter, or

in the case of the drama-focussed context, the role adopted and developed. Similarly bland, generalised comments regarding performance, where it is impossible to distinguish one candidate's performance from another's, or which band descriptors are being employed, are unsatisfactory.

It is important that all the teachers preparing and assessing candidates, adopt a common approach to filling in the record sheets and that good practice is enforced throughout a centre. There was often great variation within a centre, ranging from assessment forms providing detailed, helpful and pertinent comments on candidates, to assessment forms which were at best perfunctory.

It is a centre's responsibility to ensure that external moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records, with all sections completed and marks/arithmetic checked to eliminate mathematical and transcriptional errors.

Thankfully the majority of centres provided all the necessary information, with well presented records, increasingly word processed in part and wholly. However the one "rogue" teacher can undo the efficient hard work of a department.

The Application of the Criteria

The starting point for this must be achievement as set against the performance criteria, fixing first on a band and then secondly the mark within the band range. Comments on achievement on candidates' records should make reference to the band descriptors and give a mark out of 40 for each separate context.

Worryingly it was noted that not all centres or individual teachers within centres matched band descriptors used to the marks awarded. There were discrepancies with teachers not seeming to describe performance accurately. Good practice in awarding marks balances strengths and weaknesses, not just rewarding strengths. An explanation is given, for example as to why a candidate failed to achieve the next band when on a borderline. This aspect of the application of the criteria is particularly important where there is bunching of marks to distinguish separate performances.

The final mark is based on a simple mathematical calculation; the three separate marks are totalled and divided by three. Centres are advised to check the final calculations carefully as odd mistakes were discovered by moderators.

Importantly no assumption should be made as to a link between bands/marks and grades.

Internal Standardisation Procedures

The majority of centres continue to have secure, often very rigorous procedures in place to ensure internal standardisation of the marks. Good practice is to use cross moderation/marking exercises across groups, reorganisation of groups for assessment and department marking often using centre filmed material, together with using the filmed assessment evidence provided annually by OCR.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that all staff preparing and assessing candidates watch and discuss the filmed assessments. Signing the GCW330 form testifies to this having taken place.

However it was apparent that this had not taken place in all centres. The internally set standard must be confirmed against OCR's Agreed Standard. This is done by assessing and comparing the marks awarded by OCR for the filmed assessments, with the centre's marks, irrespective of centre size. The centre must then adjust its standard where necessary. Centre visits by an external moderator further confirm a centre's marking.

Worryingly, some centres professing to having watched the DVDs/filmed footage went on to get the "real-life" context wrong. Also centres are warned against using out of date, old material from previous specifications.

Standardisation procedures should cover assessment, task setting (not necessarily the same tasks across all groups, but all candidates meeting all the requirements) and record keeping.

Administration

This session the administration for this unit seems to have improved with centres more secure about the different arrangements for moderation than with the written controlled assessments. Centres Advisory visits this academic year have focused on administration as a key aspect to be covered.

However, some Moderators have reported centres being weeks late in sending all the relevant material, with no explanation or apology forthcoming. It is in the interests of all parties that deadlines are kept assiduously, and that candidates' results are not put in jeopardy.

To streamline procedures, as stated previously, one moderator rather than three dealt with a centre, but a minority of centres confused the different sampling arrangements for Spoken Language and those for Speaking and Listening. The Spoken Language sample is selected by OCR and an e-mail request is sent to centres. For Speaking and Listening, the sample is centre selected, unlike all other Controlled Assessments.

However although one moderator is involved, centres should keep the three components separate: A643, A652A Speaking and Listening and A652B Spoken Language. The moderation material should be presented in an easily identifiable form. Much time consuming, needless work was involved separating forms and documentation before moderation could take place.

To summarise Instructions to Centres on Moderation are available on the OCR website, as are all relevant forms, hard copies are sent into centres, admin. procedures also form a section on the online filmed footage 2012-13 and on both previous DVDs.

As centres increasingly move to systems where non-specialist examinations officers are the point of reference and dispatchers of moderation material, it is vital for the smooth running of the process that instructions regarding procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties. Examinations officers need the support of Heads of English or their deputies in all this.

However, grateful thanks are given to all those who got it right and enabled moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

In conclusion it cannot be stressed enough that centres make use of all the support material readily available for this unit, mention of which has been made previously, but to summarise:
- DVDs with commentaries and guidance, issued 2010 and 2011
- Online filmed material with accompanying commentary and guidance; 2012-13 and the new 2013-14 material issued this academic year
- Specific "real-life" context guidance
- The Consultancy Service for Speaking and Listening
- Advisory visits with centre specific feedback
- Reports to centres on the examination series, both centre specific and the Principal Moderators' general Report to Centres

The Administration procedures have been summarised previously.

Finally the Speaking and Listening component has always been a real strength for candidates, as witnessed by moderators making Advisory visits to centres. There is a great deal of good work being done and this is testimony to the hard work and dedication of the teachers involved in preparing and assessing candidates. With Speaking and Listening becoming a separately endorsed component of the qualification from June 2014, it is hoped that candidates will receive more recognition for their hard work and achievements in this area. Many thanks as always for your continuing commitment.

A651 Extended Literary Texts and Imaginative Writing

General Comments

This was a unique session in that it catered both for candidates retaking the qualification and those who were submitting work for this CA Unit for the first time.

Tasks, Texts and Responses

The central band four descriptor is "understands and demonstrates how meaning is conveyed". In band three and above this is developed to include "evaluating (commenting on/ making judgements about) language and structure as appropriate" (in ways that are relevant to task and text). Such an approach would certainly be beneficial to all candidates, irrespective of their aspirations or their choice of task and text, in so far that they can talk about language and structure throughout the piece: rather than focusing exclusively on the former.

Long narrative recapitulations should be avoided: they will not gain a great deal of credit. Neither will responses that insist on including passages on the alleged social, historical and cultural context of the work, which is not asked for and not tested in this Unit (and see below).

Themed Tasks

Although we are aware that a large number of centres are working on these for the summer there were very few examples to comment on in this session.

Steinbeck "Of Mice and Men"

"How does Steinbeck present different views of women in the novel?"

It was pleasing to see the high quality of most of the responses to this, given the views it attracted as the successor task to the very well received "disadvantaged characters" in the previous session. The best answers gave clear and well supported accounts of not only Curley's wife but also the contrasts provided by Aunt Clara and, on the other hand, the finer distinctions between Susy and Clara, their establishments and employees. Good answers made clear and distinctive separations between not only these characters but also the attitudes of the (or some of the) male characters. Strong links were made between the way Candy's weakness of character shapes his attitude to Curley's wife and Slim's strength allows him to take a different view. The ways in which the attitudes of George and, on the other hand, Lennie to the lady are driven and formed also gave rise to much acute analysis.

Less successful responses, as so often in this Unit, were shaped rather more by perceptions of the social context than of the developed detail of the text.

To repeat yet again what has been said in successive Reports to Centres: references to Social/Cultural/Historical context are not sought here and are not required. They do not necessarily detract from the merits of a response but they rarely enhance it. This is especially true of received, often generic comments, which tend to become clichés. For example, "all women in this period were housewives or prostitutes" is actually written quite often and is not helpful. Much better to explore the attitudes the men have to the prostitutes as presented in the text and link that to the way their loneliness shapes the double standard that can approve of both Aunt Clara and Susy to the mutual exclusion/disrespect of neither. A lot of otherwise good work did this but still became confused over where Curley's wife, who was rightly seen as the central

female character, fitted. The best essays explored this dilemma, seeing things clearly from multiple points of view, including her own.

William Shakespeare:

"Romeo and Juliet".

"How does Shakespeare present two or three of the older generation and their roles in the play's tragic conclusion?"

Those who did not take the themed task wrote with confidence and to good effect on "two or three of the older generation" in the play. Almost all chose the Nurse and the Friar and sometimes added points on the protagonists' parents. Generally what was said was clearer on the characters than on "their roles in then play's tragic conclusion". This latter part of the task might, in some cases, have been developed more fully, especially with regard to what is said and done in the final scene. Work on the themed task "How does the writer create an effective climax?" again did so very well. See my comments in the previous report.

"Julius Caesar"

It was pleasing to see that at last centres have turned to this much underestimated work.

Candidates answering on this task need to see that there are two discrete parts to it. First how are the plebeians presented? And secondly, how do different characters treat them? Some candidates did not do as well as they might have done because they did not respond to both parts of the task. There is plenty to say about how they are presented in Act One Scene One and Act One Scene Two as well as Act Three Scene Three. Then there are a variety of contrasts to make between the treatment they receive from different characters in those scenes. Too few candidates really milked the huge amount there is to say about the ways in Brutus and Anthony behave and speak in the latter scene.

Jane Austen "Pride and Prejudice".

The work on this text submitted by the few centres who had studied it was excellent: little comment is needed beyond a confirmation that this text **is** within the compass of GCSE candidates given that the right approaches are taken.

Wilfred Owen: "How does Owen portray the experience of going to fight in two or three poems you have studied?"

Candidates had been very well prepared on Owen, who is, presumably, also a writer of choice for English Literature. Work focussed on the traditionally more popular pieces in the Anthology: "Mental Cases" and "Disabled" (obviously a very good choice here); "Dulce et Decorum" and "Anthem for Doomed Youth". There was some more adventurous work on "Exposure" and "Spring Offensive" but few of the other poems were included.

Personal and Imaginative Writing/ Prose Fiction

Much the more popular of the two writing tasks was "The Last Time". As we hoped, this prompt elicited a very wide range of material and approaches to its development. The best work was generally (but by no means exclusively) drawn in the first instance from personal experience and worked up from a very well anchored starting point. Especially pleasing was the fact that very few candidates were tempted to write derivative accounts of war, bloodshed and extermination. Much sensitivity and well-discriminated choices were the order of the day and teachers are to be congratulated on steering candidates in directions that often displayed compassion, sympathy and awe in convincing and authentic detail.

The satellite tasks followed 1-3 in order of popularity. There was an encouraging lack of derivation and pre-supposed formality in the writing of biographies and autobiographies: accounts were clear and direct. Those who chose the interview or leaflet formats had done so consciously, regardless of the degree of direct connection with "The Last Time".

It is pleasing to see that very few candidates wrote at too great a length or attempted to emulate literary sub genres, the Tolkien style saga, for example.

There were fewer but mainly very strong responses to the "success or failure" prompt. However, the majority of them were successful because the candidates had something of great personal concern and importance to communicate. This is always a good starting point for successful work.

Good tests of the merit of a candidate's writing are often:-

- The degree of control there has been in shaping and developing the chosen (raw) material of the piece: is this greater or lesser than the sum of its parts? How completely integrated are its different (and quite possibly disparate) elements?
- The range and appropriateness of the vocabulary: is it apt, precise, well separated and lacking repetition?

Finally centres and candidates are to be congratulated on the freshness, originality and enthusiasm that characterised much of the work that moderators read.

Administrative Matters

It was very striking that centres were very successful and accurate in the moderation process. Moderators had little to disagree with in band, mark or rank order. This suggests that the job is, as I suggest above, being carried out with increasing competence and confidence.

A very few centres were quite late in submitting moderation samples: but many more were pleasingly prompt, allowing moderation to at least in part start early at the commencement of a busy assessment schedule.

There is still occasional disparity between very fully completed paperwork and a paucity of annotation on scripts to show exactly where and how marks have been awarded. Where paperwork was incomplete or in error centres were very prompt and efficient in supplying what moderators required.

The ascription and recording of marks for the writing tasks: separate marks for the different AOs for each piece, then totalled and averaged was carried out very efficiently in this session.

We are grateful to centres for their efficiency and close cooperation.

A652B Spoken Language

Once again, centres have taken great care with the administration of this unit. The thorough annotation of candidate work and the detailed teacher comments on the CAFs, showing how the centre has applied the marking criteria, are much appreciated by moderators and are very helpful in the moderation process.

Candidates are showing an increasingly sophisticated understanding of the context of the language use studied and this is enabling them to analyse effectively the reason for, and impact of, the speakers' choices and therefore access the higher bands. The most successful candidates are able to discuss the patterns of language use and comment on the detail of language choices while maintaining an overview of the whole text and its purposes.

Because of the recent changes to the GCSE, a number of the 2014 texts were seen.

A1: Language of a Public Figure

In responding to this task, less successful candidates tended to restrict comments to obvious rhetorical devices, e.g. inclusive pronouns and list of three, without really engaging with the meaning of the text. It was here that candidates were most likely to focus on the non-verbal aspects of the speech without linking it to the language use. The most successful candidates considered the differing phases of speeches made and how the language changed to support these shifts, as well as its impact on the audience.

B1: Language, Media and Technology

A range of approaches to this task were taken. Many considered how registers/ tones varied according to the context and audience and candidates were often able to present perceptive analyses to support their views, commenting on patterns of language, e.g. the differing use of modals by different presenters. In some cases candidates' opportunity to explore the texts in detail was compromised by their attempts to cover too many texts or issues; where tasks were clearly focused, candidates were more likely to structure a successful response. In their analysis of Boardroom exchanges in The Apprentice, for instance, candidates often presented carefully focused analyses of how language use varied according to gender, or how language was used to gain or demonstrate status. This focus helped candidates to make a detailed and structured response to a particular aspect of the text, rather than commenting on every utterance.

A680/01 Information and Ideas (Foundation Tier)

General Comments

The question paper proved to be accessible and of an appropriate level of demand for the tier. Candidates produced a range of responses to the reading material: an informative piece of writing entitled *Water: don't waste it* for Question 1 and a charity leaflet from Practical Action for Question 2. The two Writing questions were equally popular.

The majority of candidates had been clearly well prepared for the examination and the format of the question-and-answer booklet. Most candidates managed to confine their responses to the spaces provided in the booklet. There were far fewer candidates in this session using additional pages to answer Question 2(a). As ever, those candidates who used all the pages allocated to their chosen Section B Writing task rarely used them to profitable effect. There was some evidence to suggest that those who wrote at excessive length for Section B would have been better advised to spend a little longer on the Section A Reading questions.

Individual Questions

Section A – Reading

Question 1

1(a) – 1(c)

As before, these easier questions provided a relatively gentle way in to the paper, though not all candidates scored all 6 marks. Where errors were made, it was often because candidates had not followed the clear guidance in the questions about which paragraph to refer to.

1(d)

Stronger answers clearly tailored the points they made to the specific angle of the question: i.e. about how people can save water. They also made a good range of points, often concisely, from different sections of the relevant part of the text. Many of their points were expressed in their own words – as far as possible, as the question says.

Less successful answers tended to include material that was not relevant to the particular angle of the question, including lots of information about the topic of water consumption and not addressing with sufficient clarity the given focus: how people can save water.

Points made at excessive length and points repeated led to some loss of focus. The least successful responses often tracked the material in the passage closely without achieving a focus on the task. Occasionally there was at this level considerable lifting which suggested that the nature of the task had been misunderstood.

There was evidence once again of a loss of stamina on the part of some candidates who started their answers using own words but failed to sustain this approach throughout their answers, instead copying closely the later points in the text about using water-saving devices and throwing tissues and cotton buds in the bin.

Candidates should be reminded that there can be no reward for introductions or conclusions in their responses to 1(d). They must get to the relevant points straight away.

Question 2(a)

Most candidates took notice of the relative weightings of Q2(a) and Q2(b) – 6 and 14 marks respectively.

2(a)

Stronger responses were able to identify key features of photographs, such as the graphic photograph of the family on the roof of a house surrounded by floodwaters. They usually pointed out that the second photograph of a young woman smiling was by contrast a happier photograph, where the 'floating gardens' seen in the background were testament to the practical work the charity did. This session there were fewer fanciful ideas offered about the supposed symbolism of colours that happened to be present in a picture (e.g. 'the yellow and pink tell us they will have a bright future'). There were still, however, too many instances of unproductive general comment along the lines that photographs and headings 'draw the reader in'.

Many candidates identified the question and answer format of the headings. The strongest comments on headings considered the precise effects on a reader of particular words or phrases: the pun in the expression 'stay afloat'; the force of the word 'lifeline' used to describe the floating gardens etc.

Most candidates acknowledged the purpose of the headings and photographs in eliciting sympathy for Tara Begum and others like her. The less effective responses went little beyond saying 'they made the reader feel sorry'. Only the strongest were able to develop this key point by looking closely at the effects created by particular aspects of photographs or words in headings.

2(b)

Successful responses contained clear evidence of the ability to select and analyse relevant information points and specific words and phrases used to persuade readers of the leaflet to donate to the charity. Phrases which led to useful critical comment included 'drowning farmland', 'destroying homes', 'desperately struggling', 'dangerously prone to starvation and disease', 'cycle of misery', 'at the mercy of floods' and direct appeals such as 'please help our work today'. Candidates should be advised against writing out long quotations and effectively asking the examiner to guess which particular word or phrase illustrates the point they are making.

The ability to consider the effects of language was as ever a discriminator in this question. Less successful responses tended to make a few simple descriptive points about what the charity did or listed words or phrases from the leaflet without any critical comment. Some candidates entered the examination determined to find rules of three, alliteration and lexical fields but did not go far beyond labelling what they had found.

As mentioned in previous reports, candidates would benefit from regular practice at answering Q2(b)-style questions (perhaps on materials chosen by teachers), using both information and language points to address the question. They should be mindful that the best responses to language combine short quotation and concise analytical comment.

Section B – Writing

Examiners saw the full range of performance. Both questions produced writing of high quality that examiners enjoyed reading.

There were, however, too many instances of candidates writing at excessive length in their Writing responses, using all three pages provided in the booklet for Section B answers. It was pleasing to see some candidates use one of these pages for planning their writing. This usually led to more focused and more effectively organised work. There is no need for candidates to write more than one-and-a-half to two sides of writing (using average size of handwriting as a guide). In this amount of writing they are able to provide more than adequate evidence of an ability to write in an engaging and organised manner.

Successful answers demonstrated:

- control of the material
- engaging opening, clear development and a well-considered ending
- variety of vocabulary and sentence structures
- accurate punctuation and spelling.

Less successful answers showed:

- a relative lack of control of the material
- at best a straightforward development of ideas and perfunctory ending
- a tendency to ramble and/or repeat material
- errors of sentence division and confusion over upper and lower case letters.

In practice, successful writing is easy to follow whereas unsuccessful writing requires the reader to re-read the material to try to make sense of it.

Question 3

This was the more open-ended of the two questions. Although no specific audience was indicated in the question, the best responses showed a degree of crafting in the writing in a way that acknowledged the presence of a reader. The strongest responses were grounded in personal experience and often ended with an interesting reflection on what the writer had learned about life and about themselves through their willingness to lend a helping hand when it was needed. Sometimes candidates were constrained by what they perhaps took to be support. The appearance of mnemonics such as AFOREST, usually, at the top of the page, occasionally led to a rather strained and excessive use of adjectives or metaphors. The least successful responses opted for what appeared to be fictionalised, and often, implausible accounts.

Question 4

Strongest responses made it clear from the start that the writing was a formal talk to their peer group and sustained the idea of a talk to the end of the piece. These responses often made some effective use of questions, repetition, rules of three and hyperbole for rhetorical effect. Though less widespread than before, there was still some misguided use of fanciful statistics or unlikely surveys being conducted. The perhaps obvious topics came up frequently: uniform, apparently petty rules, canteen food, the state of the toilets. But there were also heartfelt calls for more engaging lessons, for more personal support and for less disruption from those ill-disposed to work. Many spoke warmly of what their schools and teachers were already doing for them.

A680/02 Information and Ideas (Higher Tier)

General Comments

As would be expected, in what was largely a re-sit session with some early entry candidates, performance was variable. Schools are urged to look closely at Tier entry. A candidate who struggles to grasp the Higher Tier Reading passages, or who demonstrates poor accuracy in Writing is unlikely to score highly on this paper. The paper was well received and the subject matter proved very accessible, with themes from the texts frequently providing stimulus material for each of the two writing tasks. Examiners reported some improvement in the candidates' approach to Q1 and Q2, with more clarity in the understanding of task and avoidance of overlap in terms of content and comment. Rubric error was rare, as was failure to complete the paper. Also, it was pleasing to note that responses tended to be more succinct and better organised; illustrating growing confidence and understanding of the best approach to tasks.

Question 1

For many candidates this provided the highest mark of the three Reading questions and there was sensible selection of relevant facts. Whilst there is no word limit for this task, examiners did report that more and more candidates are keeping a close watch on their word count and this is helping them to avoid excessive length and digression. Having said that, candidates must be mindful that a brief answer is not necessarily a 'concise' answer and a good range of clearly delivered, specific information points must be offered. Discrimination between what is a point of information and what is detailed elaboration is vital. It was enough to state that malaria leads to death through major organ failure; there was no need to list the major organs. Simply stating that children were most at risk sufficed; there was no need to quote the statistics. Candidates who tried to summarise the whole article scored less through losing focus. Candidates who failed to give equal attention to both parts of the question also limited their scores. There was one curious misreading noted in a number of responses concerning the phrase '*between dusk and dawn*' whereby the word '*between*' was not understood and this information was distorted to suggest that mosquitos only feed *at* two specific times of day, with candidates then showing bemusement as to why anyone would then spend the night under a net. Improvement in the use of 'own words' is noted with each session, although there are still too many candidates who quote. I have struggled to find an amusing 'own words' example this year (which is a good sign) but it was slightly odd to see candidates writing about the activities of the 'Lady Mosquito'.

Question 2

The article gave two large images for comment and it was disappointing to see that many candidates chose to comment on only one, usually the close up of the insect. There was some good comment on the emotional response generated by this image but, without looking to the end of the article, candidates missed the opportunity to comment on the impact the images have together in terms of showing the problem and the solution, or 'the enemy and the defence' as one candidate noted. There were some good attempts to link the images to the text, with candidates observing that it is through the text we understand that the feeding mosquito could be transmitting a killer disease. Again, it is after reading the statistics about child mortality that the reader understands the threat to the baby if the net was not there. It was very pleasing to note greater awareness of the need to offer comment on language in this session. The emotive effects of close focus on one woman's journey to collect her nets generated good comment, often linked to a structure point that this is what opens and closes the article. Whilst centres do need to encourage candidates to look at language, care should be taken to avoid excessive focus on just one or two words in isolation. Examiners did report some curious and largely unsuccessful responses which simply quoted single words or short phrases from the text and went on to offer various personal associations prompted by the words, often without relevance or sense of context. In the most extreme example, one candidate structured the entire response

around the phrase '*magic bullets*'. Candidates do need to spend time on careful reading to ensure that they acquire a secure overview of the whole piece before they begin writing.

Examiners did report further reduction in the use of prepared formula comment but there are still some candidates falling back on stock phrases that could apply to *any* article, when they should be looking for the specific qualities of the given article. This was particularly evident in comment on the sub-headings. Candidates who asserted all headings were rhetorical questions and proceeded to define the device demonstrated misunderstanding of both the term and the text. It is particularly unfortunate and detrimental to the candidate's score when formula comment impedes delivery of the information points. Frequently candidates offered a perfectly sound quotation of fact or statistic but then confined themselves to saying. 'It proves the writer knows what he's talking about.' Similarly, the quotation sometimes came from a named individual, such as Dr Juma. Many candidates simply added, 'She's an expert so we trust her. It's reliable.' This approach denies candidates access to the valid points that could and should be made about how factual information and references are used, in this case to persuade us of the importance of nets. Candidates should not be encouraged to speculate on the target audience of an article, nor should they invent their own purpose. The target audience was not 'people who don't have nets' and the writer's purpose was not 'to make us all go out and buy nets'.

Question 3

Text B will always need careful reading and thought before attempting to write a response. Candidates who took in only the first paragraph with its 'good old moan' response to Comic Relief demonstrated only partial understanding. There was even some misunderstanding of the opening section when candidates offered fruitless speculation as to what the connection between Red Nose Day and a general election might be, ignoring Webb's own statement that both 'take over our TV viewing'. More successful candidates looked to the conclusion of Webb's musings and were then more aware of the twists and turns in the argument and the tonal shifts leading to the declaration that it 'might be worth watching'. Here, as in previous sessions, candidates seeking one clear opinion or 'biased' approach often lacked the flexibility needed to response to Text B, which was in this case very much an exploratory approach to 'mixed feelings' and not an attack on charity.

Candidates worked well with the comic description of the writer with his family and as a student. Some fell back on the formula, 'it's an anecdote and so it's relatable' but most made good effort to respond to Webb's parody of the scolding tones that put viewers in the position of being 'told off for 12 hours'. Candidates engaged effectively with the exaggeration involved in descriptions of student fundraising, although one candidate did express approval of power-spraying with mushy peas, saying he would certainly pay good money to see that done to some members of his teaching staff. The image of a 'gigantic collision with a wig and a leotard' also provoked response.

There were some sensitive responses to language, particularly around the description of the good achieved through fundraising: 'He writes so that we see people are not just kept alive but are enjoying things life has to give, like falling in love and having families.' Most candidates made a good attempt to explore the writer's tone and whilst weaker students still confined themselves to assertions of 'negative' and 'informal' most tried to explore within the terms of the question and to see how the 'chatty' style ('*Give me a break!*', '*Good luck to you.*') led the reader to more thoughtful views on attitudes to charity. Candidates who lack overview frequently miss the structure of a piece and it is worth noting that ideas about structure will never be encompassed by the phrase 'it is in paragraphs of mixed length'. Here the movement from Webb's present feelings to past attitudes, to other people's objections, before coming to a resolution was not given sufficient attention.

Question 4

This was a very successful task and candidates demonstrated secure understanding of the leaflet format, adapting their language and tone to suit audience and purpose with some skill. Candidates that made one single, clear choice of a good cause performed better than those who urged readers to 'do good' in more general terms. The best responses drew on a variety of language devices: using emotive descriptions; including personal testimony and anecdote; offering supporting facts and figures. Strong, attention grabbing openings featured, as did heartfelt final pleas to conclude and the leaflet format encouraged concise, tightly structured responses. Examiners were impressed with the wide range of worthwhile causes that candidates were familiar with and committed to, with Help for Heroes and Childline featuring strongly alongside less well-known local projects. Worthy of particular note was the candidate who provided compelling argument for provision of weatherproof ponchos for the homeless, in what was both a highly emotive piece and a fully comprehensive, viable business plan. And if candidates couldn't think of a worthwhile cause, the information on Malaria eradication was available and many took advantage of this. Success here depended on ability to rework the material and it was not possible to give credit for direct lifting from Text A.

Question 5

Examiners frequently experience déjà vu on question five and this session was no exception with many candidates writing on the efforts that they had put in while making the 'good decision' they had made for the June 2013 paper. Sadly, the concision and tight organisation that featured in question 4 was less well represented here with some lengthy accounts of schemes from inception to completion filled with a lot of unhelpful elaboration. However, one good point of technique noted by examiners is the thoughtful employment of flashback, whereby the story started in present time with, for example, the moment of glory and then moved back in time to cover the build up to that moment. This proved very successful for many candidates and often led to a well-rounded ending which returned the reader to the starting point. Any such device which promotes good structure in a piece of writing is to be encouraged although, as a note of caution, it can lead candidates into some confusion with tense agreement. Ideas generated from the text on Comic Relief prompted anecdotes of fundraising activities successfully completed. 'Effort' was put into a variety of other activities, from organising surprise parties to securing coveted work placements. The efforts needed in personal relationships featured strongly and were written on effectively, whether making efforts to befriend a newcomer or to get on with a step-parent. Candidates explored issues here with considerable maturity and sensitivity. Likewise candidates who have had to work to overcome serious and disabling medical conditions wrote of their struggles with a moving blend of pragmatism and humour.