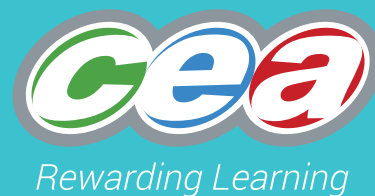


GCSE



Chief Examiner's and
Principal Moderator Report
English Language

Summer Series 2019



Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2019 series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's section on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Chief Examiner's Report

Subject Overview

In this series, both units of the revised specification were available for the first time and it was clear that, overall, the candidature successfully handled the challenges of GEN11 and GEN41. As always, there was much evidence of effective teaching and that past papers, mark schemes and Specimen Assessment Materials (SAMs) had been well utilised to help prepare candidates for both papers.

Most candidates completed the papers within the time constraints, demonstrating their ability to manage their time. Examiners felt that, where timing was an issue, it was usually down to spending too much time on the writing tasks though this appeared to be more evident in GEN41. It is important to emphasise that the top Competence Levels are accessible for concise responses in all sections of the papers. Some candidates seem driven to take several additional pages for each response but, particularly in writing tasks, this can lead to a loss of focus.

Several examiners from both units reported that they struggled to read the handwriting in some of their scripts. The final piece of advice under "INFORMATION FOR CANDIDATES" on the front cover of both booklets is: "Examiners can only credit what they can read. Keep your work legible". It would be worthwhile emphasising the importance of readability to candidates preparing for these two examinations though it is also worth noting that examiners don't expect perfectly formed handwriting under examination conditions. In fact, it is always heartening to see self-correcting/editing in evidence so amending mistakes and making improvements to responses is to be encouraged.

Assessment Unit 1 Writing for Purpose and Audience and Reading to Access Non- fiction and Media Texts

Overview

As well as affording the more able candidates the opportunity to excel, both sections of this paper also proved accessible to the full range of ability levels entered for this examination. Thorough preparation was clear to see and almost all candidates were keen to demonstrate their capabilities. As expected, there were some highly confident and sophisticated responses to Tasks One, Two and Four at the top end of the ability range. Equally, it is gratifying to report that it was clear that candidates across all levels of the ability range had been equipped with a range of skills and strategies to engage appropriately and effectively with the tasks.

Task 1

Candidates of all abilities could access and engage with the universally relatable topic of school uniform. The use of humour was widely evident and this, along with conscious efforts to create rapport with a school magazine audience, made for very many engaging, persuasive and entertaining responses. Perhaps surprisingly, many candidates took a positive view of uniform and how it, for example, allowed them extra time to sleep in the morning as well as acknowledging the issues of bullying if the uniform policy was to be abolished.

There was clear evidence of the teaching of counter arguments and linguistic techniques in order to present a well-defined line of argument. It is also pleasing to report that responses at all ability levels demonstrated effective planning/structuring and displayed skills such as incorporating personal anecdotes and using punctuation for effect.

Unfortunately, there continues to be a very small number of candidates who studiously ignore the specified topic and format preferring to write about something of their own choosing or which they seemed to have prepared beforehand. Some clearly able candidates took this self-limiting decision.

The vast majority of candidates were able to respond positively to this task but the following issues were highlighted by examiners and would be useful to discuss with prospective candidates:

- The audience for a school magazine doesn't just comprise of fellow classmates; its wider compass wasn't always recognised.
- The importance of quality over quantity.
- The inclusion of fictional "expert opinion" and "statistics" from "research" didn't really sit well with this particular task and these implausible "facts" often weakened rather than strengthened a line of argument. Incorporating authentic opinions, experiences and anecdotes was a strategy much more likely to engage and persuade in this task.
- There was a sense that some candidates wrote to fill the available space in the booklet. Their articles had come to a natural conclusion but they seemed compelled to write on. This often weakened potentially more effective endings.
- While most candidates offered well-considered arguments, a very small minority took the opportunity to simply rant in an inappropriate manner about their schools which betrayed a diminished sense of purpose and audience.
- As would be expected, the use of rhetorical devices overall served to enhance the quality of responses but a few examiners felt that there was an overuse of techniques such as alliteration and questions in some responses.
- The usual culprits of inappropriately joined up words were still evident, for example: "everyday"; "alot"; "eachother"; "infront"; "incase"; "infact"; "aswell".
- In some responses, commas were used when full stops or semi-colons were required. The importance, however, of not only accurate but creative use of punctuation to enhance and enliven writing should always be fostered.
- The ubiquitous use of "use", "you" or "youse" is still apparent though perhaps less so in this series as the writing task was not a speech.

Task 2

The article on fizzy drinks proved very accessible for candidates of all abilities as it provided a rich resource in terms of selecting relevant material and identifying how the writer shared his concerns. The opening line's fairy tale quality, the question posed about cigarette packaging and the repetition of the word 'now' were popular examples to comment on with most of the candidature. Overall, the candidates understood the requirements of the task but some offered their personal opinions on the issue instead of analysing the techniques used by the writer. As always, there was clear evidence of PEE being used by candidates of all abilities.

The following should prove a useful checklist of teaching points (they also apply to Task 4):

- Some candidates, even those who were responding to a very high standard in other tasks, made the mistake of listing as many devices and quotations as possible, offering only a minimal/general consideration of writer's intentions.

- Another misguided approach is ‘parroting’ learned off general effects of linguistic techniques rather than applying them to the specific text. To do well in this task (and Task 4) a candidate should aim to offer a range of judiciously selected examples alongside analysis that is underpinned/strengthened by a thoughtful consideration of the focus of the task.
- Following on from the point above, a significant number of candidates commented on how the writer engaged the reader rather than getting to grips with how language was used to “share his concerns about fizzy drinks” as stipulated in the task. Candidates would be well advised to take careful note of the focus of each reading task as it is only logical that the mark scheme will centre on those focal points.
- At the lower end (though not always) of the ability range, explanations often included the recurrent use of basic phraseology such as: ‘this engages the reader’; ‘this also engages the reader to read on’ and ‘this draws the reader in’. Candidates who had understood the purpose of the text and the focus of the task did not fall into this trap.
- Some candidates are still writing unnecessary and time-wasting ‘introductions’ and ‘conclusions’ which add nothing to the quality of their interpretation of the text.
- The use of overlong quotations is to be discouraged; they don’t add depth to responses and simply take up too much valuable time to copy out.
- The Examining Team noted some confusion regarding ‘contrast’ and ‘juxtaposition’ in responses.

Task 3

Most candidates were clearly briefed and able to identify a harmful effect from each paragraph, attempt to explain this in their own words and retrieve two relevant pieces of evidence. There were some issues with candidates trying to put “fizzy drinks” into their own words (‘very sweet, carbonated beverages’ was a particularly impressive effort though obviously not creditworthy). A few candidates, however, seemed confused about how to approach this task despite the supportive layout of the booklet and clear instructions about what to do. These errors are listed below:

- Misunderstanding what is meant by ‘evidence’ and offering proof of the dangers of fizzy drinks instead of straightforward quotations from the text.
- Inappropriately attempting to put the evidence into “your own words” as well as the harmful effects.
- Misinterpreting how to use both paragraphs in terms of offering the harmful effects and selected evidence. Some chose all the evidence and/or identified both reasons from the same paragraph or wrongly attributed the supporting evidence in (b) and (d). Some candidates only supplied one piece of evidence from each paragraph thus limiting the marks achieved.
- Copying out chunks of texts instead of attempting to use “your own words” to explain the harmful effects.
- Wasting time analysing and evaluating the effectiveness of the supporting evidence instead of just ‘lifting’ it verbatim from the text.

Task 4

In general, examiners felt that candidates who had done well in Task 2, tended to replicate this success in Task 4. If a candidate had misjudged timing, however, this task was often the ‘casualty’. Overall, the candidature demonstrated a sound understanding of the requirements of this task and the clear purpose and audience of the text enabled candidates of a wide range of ability to respond appropriately. The use of ellipsis on the first line and the character descriptions were popular choices to comment on; very many also recognised the use of humour and modern touches to help promote the show. Quite a few referred to the production of Cinderella as a DVD/ ‘movie’ rather than as a theatrical play.

The checklist for Task 2 also pertains to this task but an examiner made this interesting point regarding Task 4 in particular which would be worth discussing with future candidates:

“I felt students were more detached from the aspect of ‘writer’s intentions’ in this task as there was not an actual named writer in the same way there is in Task 2 - many overlooked the fact that there is still a distinct ‘writer’ behind this piece of writing.”

Task 5

As with Task 3, the ‘structured’ format is intended to make this accessible to all and the majority of candidates followed instructions and had successful outcomes. Perhaps because of the “Princess” theme of the stimulus material there was, overall, a secure understanding of the colour selection and the use of features such as the sparkles and lipstick. The use of the mirror to capture an intriguing glimpse of the main character was not lost on the candidature. Most also understood the significance of the Eiffel Tower in indicating the romantic setting/backdrop for this modern version of the play.

Marks are, however, still being needlessly lost:

- Candidates still offered non-specific references to presentational features such as “image”, “colour” or “layout” for example. In the majority of such cases, however, the candidates went on to achieve well in their explanations.
- Others tried to cover their options in (b) and (d) by offering analysis of several examples of, for example, the use of colour or images rather than focusing on one specific example. When a ‘multiple’ approach like this is used, examiners are always instructed to underline and credit the best explanation offered for one example.
- As in previous examination series there were a couple of instances when, having identified an appropriate feature, the candidate inexplicably went on to explain something totally unrelated.
- Some candidates overestimate what they need to do and try to comment more comprehensively than necessary on a wide range of features – even using additional response pages to do so. While this doesn’t usually result in losing marks for this task, it does use up time which would be better spent elsewhere.

Principal Moderator's Report

Assessment Unit 2 Speaking and Listening

Overview

The Moderation Team was pleased and encouraged to note that in this the first Summer series of the new specification for GEN21 Speaking and Listening, the majority of centres responded in an appropriate and positive manner.

The new administration requirement to use the eCRS system was completed efficiently. However, moderators found that many centres had not printed off hard copies of the Candidate Record Sheets for the candidates being moderated. This delayed the moderation process in some cases as centre staff acquired this documentation.

Formative records were mostly helpful and informative and moderators were pleased to see that most centres were using the CCEA proforma which is available to download from the CCEA website. (Centres are reminded that this proforma must be used.) There was evidence in some cases, of literature-based role play tasks being offered as formative tasks throughout the course. The specification states clearly that pupils must, *'create and sustain different roles from a range of real-life contexts'*. For this reason, hot-seating tasks or monologues as literary characters constitute a breach of the rubric. Texts can certainly be used as springboards for creating opportunities in Speaking and Listening but the tasks themselves must be set in real-life contexts. The range of tasks undertaken in Centres differed widely. In the best cases, moderators noted an excellent variety, arising naturally from the work undertaken during the course, thus allowing candidates to develop their skills and explore new ideas. At the other end of the scale, it was disappointing to see a limited number of tasks. This is not in keeping with the spirit of the Unit and is undoubtedly detrimental to the progress of the candidates concerned. Centres are reminded of the guidance in the Instructions to Teachers booklet which states,

'3.2 The range of speaking and listening activities candidates undertake should give them the opportunity to respond in a variety of situations. At least two tasks should be completed for each task type. This will facilitate both formal and informal opportunities.'

Centres are still required to present a rank order for each of the moderated groups. Whilst this was provided by the majority of Centres, there were still some Centres which had not prepared these in advance. This document is an essential tool for the moderator who has to check that the formula for the selection of candidates has been applied accurately.

Centres are asked to note that there are certain administrative documents which are used to facilitate the moderator's work. These are not available for scrutiny by the Centre. The moderator will share the appropriate documents with Centre staff. For any further queries about this documentation, please contact the Education Manager for English.

There continues to be evidence of staffing issues in Centres and Heads of Department are urged to fill in the front page of the EAD63(b) form (Moderation Record Sheet) to record this and any other exceptional circumstances which may impact on candidates' progress/performance. Candidate absence and the necessity for a reserve candidate to be used in moderation caused fewer problems for moderators on the day of moderation as reserves had been chosen in advance and had taken part in the preparation process. In cases where this had not happened, moderators concluded that the inclusion of unprepared replacements negatively affected group dynamics and performance, resulting in levels not being achieved during the moderation exercise.

Internal Standardisation is a vital tool to ensure that, as far as possible, each teacher has applied the Assessment Criteria consistently and accurately when marking assessments. In some centres the Internal Standardisation method used had not been sufficiently robust, resulting in inconsistent marking. This required the moderator to request a Second Moderation visit which placed further pressure on the department to review the marks awarded and make the necessary adjustments before making arrangements for a second visit. CCEA has a range of resources to facilitate effective Internal Standardisation. These include online recordings and commentaries available on the subject website. Other methods are outlined in the *'Instructions to Teachers Booklet'*. The Agreement Trials are another crucial part of the mechanism of supporting Centres in understanding the agreed standard that can then inform Internal Standardisation. At these meetings, Senior Moderators provide teachers with opportunities to assess candidates of different levels of ability in a variety of Speaking and Listening situations. Attendance also offers teachers the opportunity to share good practice with colleagues from other schools.

Clarification on the role of the Chairperson was also offered in advance of the Summer 2019 series and Centres should take note that the candidate who fulfils this important role should manage both the discussion and also the timing aspect (20 minute discussion). Most candidates in this role handled these elements efficiently but some did not seem to be able to conclude the discussion without the intervention of the moderator. This is worth consideration when appointing the Chairperson for each group. Some groups exhibited symptoms of anxious over-preparation and, as a result, did not perform to the best of their ability. Centres are reminded that candidates should be given the opportunity to select the task for discussion and have time to engage in some background research for the topic. Allowing some time for the group members, identified by the formula, to discuss the task or tasks prior to the moderator's visit is in order, however, over-preparation can be stultifying. A rehearsed discussion is difficult to assess positively as the flow and spontaneity of the discussion is impacted when candidates deliver their contributions to the discussion in this way. It is important to strike the right balance and the following advice may be helpful:

- Candidates should be given constructive advice and guidance from the teacher when selecting an appropriate task for moderation.
- Some advance research can be helpful and should be encouraged.
- The Chairperson should be briefed to understand how long the discussion should last and when to conclude it.
- All candidates should be made aware that moderation is part of a formal process requiring good conduct and punctuality.
- The ability of the candidate should be considered when assigning roles (when applicable).
- Teachers should note that all tasks offered for external moderation is assessed using the Assessment Criteria for Interacting with Others.

The full range of tasks was accessed by the candidature for this series. The most popular one was the 'assisted dying' task and special praise must be extended to those who selected it for the sensitive and mature way in which they addressed the key issues. Each series, account is taken of the broad and varied spectrum of candidates taking this compulsory GCSE qualification when tasks for moderation are being considered, composed and quality assured. The aim is to have a selection which will allow for varying educational institutions, age groups and ability. With this in mind, CCEA is always happy to accept suggestions for suitable tasks from any Centre willing to submit ideas.

This year, CCEA invited the Head of Department to remain in the room during the moderation process:

‘In line with the Child Protection Policy in most schools, the Head of Department should sit in on the moderation process in a purely observational capacity.’

Moderators were pleased to report that a majority of Heads of Departments found this to be a positive experience especially when certain candidates either over-performed or under-achieved on the day. It must be stressed, however, that the teacher’s role during the moderation process is in a purely observational capacity and that no discussion of the process can be undertaken after each group has performed.

Levels 4 & 5 continue to be the most problematic as candidates must demonstrate the ability to ‘challenge’ and ‘interrogate’ respectively for moderators to be able to support marks in these levels. These vital skills must be taught and honed throughout the course to ensure that the marks for candidates at these levels are justified.

Overall, it is pleasing to report that assessments made by teachers were generally sound with only a small number of adjustments being implemented. Teachers are to be praised for their diligence in assimilating and applying the Assessment Criteria. Candidates are also to be commended for the interesting and well informed discussions observed by moderators.

Assessment Unit 3 The Study of Spoken and Written Language

Overview

All members of the CCEA English Language Moderation Team agreed that, with some exceptions, the majority of Centres set suitable task titles, complied with CCEA’s instructions on annotation and accurately assessed the work of their candidates. Almost all task titles were appropriately theme-related and clearly satisfied the CCEA rubric requirements. Moreover, candidates in many Centres benefitted from the provision of appropriate support structures, generally in the form of a series of assessment-criterion-referenced bullet points. Stimulus material, for both Task 1 and Task 2 was carefully selected to match the interests and abilities of most candidates. Where carefully planned and designed, task titles enabled candidates of different levels of ability to respond successfully. Despite the changes to the marking of Controlled Assessment pieces in the revised specification, teachers in most Centres interpreted and applied the CCEA Assessment Criteria accurately across the two tasks and across the mark range in their Centre. It was obvious that effective Internal Standardisation had been carried out in most Centres.

Administration Procedures

Whilst the process of uploading marks to the electronic moderation system continues to be an overall success, teachers should take note of the following points:

- It is important to transfer the marks accurately from the candidates’ work to the electronic system.
- The folder of the candidate at the top of the rank order must be submitted.
- The folder of the candidate at the bottom of the rank order (if the folder is complete) must be submitted.
- Incomplete folders should not be submitted – the adjacent folder (by candidate numerical order) should be substituted.
- Sample folders should be placed in rank order with the summative mark recorded on the outside of each folder.

- Each candidate's work should be placed in an individual folder.
- The Competence Level for each strand as well as the mark awarded must be recorded on each response.

As in recent years, administration in most Centres was excellent and helpful to the moderation process.

Task 1 (The Study of Spoken Language: 10%)

To satisfy the CCEA rubric requirements for Task 1, candidates must respond to 'real spoken language' texts, that is, texts which involve real people (living or dead) in real situations. Teachers in almost all Centres took great care to select appropriate Interviews as their spoken language texts. There was a wide and varied range of **interviews** including interviews with David Beckham, George Galloway, Russell Brand, Jeremy Clarkson, Meg Ryan, Joe Broly, Michelle Obama, JK Rowling and Lance Armstrong. It was pleasing to see a lot of new and topical material and the enthusiasm evident in the responses of many candidates.

Task titles were often based on two spoken language texts involving the same person or quite often the same interviewee being interviewed by different presenters. Most Centres had made a conscious effort to ensure that these interviews were relevant and engaging for their candidates and included ample opportunity for meaningful cross-referencing. While the vast majority of Centres selected stimulus material which appealed to their candidates, some Centres could have been more judicious in their selection. The stimulus materials worked well when there was a range of linguistic and delivery techniques for candidates to explain, analyse and evaluate. However, on occasion, the material selected, did not contain the depth or breadth of material to facilitate analytical or evaluative responses. Whilst candidates were not required to compare and contrast, teachers in most Centres appropriately based the task title on two texts which were linked in some way. Candidates in a relatively small number of Centres were asked to respond to two quite lengthy texts which made it difficult for them to explain, analyse or evaluate specific details related to the speaker's use of language, rhetorical devices and delivery techniques. However, teachers in a significant number of Centres set task titles based upon a short and carefully chosen extract from each of the two texts, appropriate for the 60-minute time limit. This approach was beneficial to candidates of different levels of ability as it enabled them to focus on specific and relevant details of language, rhetorical devices and delivery techniques.

Task titles were generally assessment-criterion-referenced which helped to focus candidates on the demands of the task title though it was obvious that candidates in their responses were more familiar with discussion of linguistic techniques than delivery techniques. It is important that candidates are explicitly taught how to explain, analyse and evaluate language choice and effect, linguistic techniques and their effects and delivery techniques and effects. There was evidence that delivery techniques had been marginalised or overlooked by many candidates. Moreover, candidates in some Centres still included too much unnecessary biographical detail and contextual information that was not meaningful.

Whilst many Centres applied the Assessment Criteria accurately, there was generally a tendency towards leniency, especially at the top end of achievement. Candidates in some Centres were rewarded for simply referring to the speaker's language, rhetorical devices and delivery techniques. Many Centres awarded candidates CL 555, when there was no evidence of an evaluative response. Some responses quoted the speaker's choice of language and commented on it in a general way, but did not analyse the language or technique being used in terms of its impact on the listener or audience. There was often relatively little evaluation of the speaker's linguistic or delivery techniques. In some Centres, references to the audience being inspired, were inappropriately interpreted as evaluation and rewarded accordingly. As always, candidates should be taught at as early a stage as possible, the differences between explanation, analysis and evaluation. Candidates need to better understand what appropriate explanations, purposeful analysis and clearly focused evaluation are. This is the key to achieving success for all candidates.

In a small number of Centres, candidates were inappropriately rewarded for the inclusion of commentary on aspects of non-verbal communication such as facial expression and body language. Candidates in a small number of Centres were also rewarded for the inclusion of comments related to written language features such as the effectiveness of specific punctuation devices such as ellipsis, brackets and exclamation marks. This is not appropriate as the focus of Task 1 is 'Spoken Language'.

Teachers are reminded that secretarial errors made in Task 1 responses should neither be highlighted nor penalised.

Centres that submitted work to the Portfolio Clinic and applied the recommendations were most accurate in making their assessment judgements.

The CCEA Unit 3 Clarification Document includes contextualised examples of candidate responses across all five Competence Levels.

Most centres included copies of the stimulus material for Task 1 for each of the sampled candidates. **Please note that it is a requirement to forward to CCEA all photocopied materials that candidates have access to during the timed assessment.**

Task 2 (The Study of Written Language: 10%)

This year's themes **Loyalty and/or Disloyalty** afforded many opportunities for teachers to plan and design appropriate task titles based upon a wide range of texts across the three literary genres. 'Of Mice and Men', predictably, was the most popular text for Task 2. This text enabled some candidates to produce confident, analytical and perceptive responses, especially to the exploration of the Loyalty and/or Disloyalty of a range of characters in the novella. However, some responses to the novella, became narrative, explaining what had happened to George, Lennie and other characters, rather than analysing and evaluating the various aspects clearly outlined in the Assessment Criteria.

Other popular choices were 'Animal Farm', 'To Kill a Mockingbird', 'Macbeth' and 'Lord of the Flies'. In most cases, task titles were carefully planned and designed. In many Centres, appropriate scaffolding, in the form of a series of assessment-criterion-referenced bullet points, was provided. Most candidates had been advised well to select and analyse appropriate detail in relation to the character or theme and to maintain clear focus on the question. Candidates also demonstrated that they had thought carefully about the writer's craft, intentions and effect on the reader. In the higher Competence Levels there was some very deft and sophisticated use of embedded quotations which enabled candidates to comment on language in a subtle and discriminating way. Less able responses were characterised by a tendency to retell the story; in many, however, this was coupled with an enthusiasm for what they had read and a clear willingness to express opinions on it. However, there were some task titles which were less enabling. These titles tended to be too general, requiring candidates to focus on the entire novel or play, often resulting in responses that were largely narrative. Teachers in some Centres set task titles based upon poetry such as that of Seamus Heaney, Carol Ann Duffy, Wilfred Owen and Rupert Brooke. These successfully enabled candidates to analyse and evaluate to a greater extent. Some Centres used short stories such as 'The Lottery' which proved accessible and engaging or short stories by authors such as Roald Dahl, Michele Roberts or Bernard MacLaverty. 'Blood Brothers' and 'Macbeth' also featured, but candidates did not respond as successfully, as the impact on the audience was not dealt with in any great depth and candidates rarely evaluated the techniques used by the playwright.

Again, those Centres which had included assessment-criterion-referenced support structures in their task titles provided the candidates with a much clearer focus on the Assessment Objectives.

Most Centres which used poetry, short stories or extracts from longer texts, included copies of the stimulus material for Task 2 for each of the sampled candidates. **Please note that it is a requirement to forward to CCEA all photocopied materials that candidates have access to during the timed assessment.** In cases where a full text is used as the stimulus, and candidates are not permitted to write on these during their assessment, there is no requirement to forward these to CCEA.

In a number of Centres, however, there was evidence of an overly-led teacher approach to Task 2. In some teaching groups, this resulted in the production of formulaic responses. In such cases, many candidates used the same paragraph-by-paragraph structure and selected the same textual details and quotations to support or introduce very similar points. At CL 4, candidates are expected to include 'clearly engaged analytical responses' with 'a sustained interpretation' and 'purposeful analysis of the writer's techniques'. If a significant number of candidates in a teaching group or Centre use the same textual details to make similar points and to construct a similar overall response, it is difficult to credit the work of individual candidates with marks in CL 4. 'A confident evaluative response' with 'assured evaluation of the writer's techniques' is required for CL 5. To satisfy these assessment criteria, candidates should be encouraged and enabled to build an individual and critical response. It is therefore essential that they select and examine appropriate textual details of their own choice.

Teachers are reminded that secretarial errors made in Task 2 should neither be highlighted nor penalised.

Again, Centres that availed of the opportunity to submit work to the Portfolio Clinic and applied the recommendations were most accurate in making their assessment judgements.

Overall, the members of the CCEA GCSE English Language Moderation Team were pleased with the range and standard of work produced this year by candidates of different levels of ability in Centres across Northern Ireland. The candidates had obviously worked extremely hard and had clearly benefitted from the expertise of their teachers. Task titles were clearly defined, enabling and appropriate, and many teachers interpreted and applied the CCEA Assessment Criteria accurately. Furthermore, in most cases, there was clear evidence of effective Internal Standardisation, resulting in candidates being awarded the appropriate overall Unit 3 mark.

Chief Examiner's Report

Assessment Unit 4 Personal or Creative Writing and Reading Literary and Non-fiction Texts

Overview

The Examining Team were in agreement that this paper offered scope to the full range of ability levels and that most candidates had been very well prepared to meet its requirements. There were some exceptional responses to all four tasks and papers that were, deservedly, awarded full marks but examiners were also impressed with the positive approach taken by candidates at the lower end of the ability range. They had clearly been equipped with a range of strategies giving them the confidence to tackle each task though this was more evident in the writing section.

Most candidates used their time wisely but some spent far too long on Task 1 and then struggled with the restricted time limits for the reading tasks in Section B. The layout of the response booklet was very well received and the thinking behind a separate insert for use with Task 2 was understood and appreciated. While a lot of additional pages were requested, in quite a few cases less would have been more – particularly as regards the writing task.

Most examiners welcomed the use of two short extracts from Shari Low's newspaper article for Tasks 3 and 4 as this was seen as more enabling towards the end of the paper rather than tackling another single task based on a longer extract. This was, however, the section where candidates who had invested too much time on the first two tasks inevitably paid the price. Unfortunately, in a few cases both of these non-fiction tasks were not responded to or the responses were clearly unfinished.

The language used in the article was universally considered to be accessible to all ability levels. The candidature engaged well with both tasks – perhaps because they were able to utilise skills also used in GEN11 – but it was felt that, overall, responses to Task 4 were more successful. It was also generally felt that candidates who performed well in Task 2 did not necessarily perform well in Tasks 3 and 4 (and vice versa).

For the first time, the writing section presented a choice of relating a personal experience or creating a narrative around an image – in this instance, of three children within a beach setting. The personal writing task with the focus on a "proudest moment" proved to be by far the more popular choice. In Section B, the language used in the stimulus texts was thought to be accessible to all ability levels while still providing top candidates the opportunity to access the higher Competence Levels.

Examiners' comments reflected much positivity about this first series for GEN41:

"I was very impressed with the number of candidates who knew to employ sentence variation, similes and a lively style to enhance their writing. At the top end, I was genuinely moved and entertained by responses which reflected a mature voice, with a poignant understanding of the power of language."

"Overall, candidates coped very well indeed with four tasks within the timeframe. Some wonderful personal and creative responses at all ability levels – very engaging and a privilege to read."

"...the choices of texts for Section B were superb. Candidates were enabled by the literature section and the focus on tension. The non-fiction extracts were relevant and engaging for students."

“The stimulus texts for the reading tasks were ‘spot-on’. The language used was accessible to all so top candidates were able to deal effectively with the more sophisticated nuances whilst less able candidates still easily managed to access more obvious features.”

“On the whole, I would say that the paper was well tailored to meet the needs of all ability levels. Most candidates were well primed to undertake the tasks with confidence and offered relevant and purposeful responses.”

“It was most gratifying to see pupils of all abilities achieving well, especially those you could tell it didn’t come naturally to but they had worked hard at their exam technique/planning/timing to do themselves justice.”

As was the case for GEN11, however, several examiners reported that they had encountered some difficulties regarding the quality of handwriting. One examiner had this to say: *“... in some cases the writing was miniscule or illegible making it very difficult, if not almost impossible, to read.”*

Task 1

There were very many entertaining, interesting and thought-provoking responses to both the personal and creative writing tasks. Quality teaching was clearly evident with candidates at all ability levels paying attention to effective structuring (particularly openings) and using a range of rhetorical techniques, figurative language, varied sentence types/lengths and punctuation to engage in a positive and lively way.

To quote one examiner: *“Both the personal and creative writing tasks were successful in allowing candidates to showcase their writing skills and some fabulous responses were produced. I enjoyed reading about the candidates’ proudest moments and even shed a few tears! I was also immensely impressed by how the candidates were able to immerse themselves in the image provided to create original and imaginative responses”.*

A small number of candidates (some highly competent), however, completely ignored the specified task and/or stimulus image submitting responses of their own choosing. Unfortunately, particularly with the creative option, some of these responses had evidence of being prepared beforehand. Future candidates should be advised not to attempt to submit such responses as it will have a negative impact on the marks that can be awarded to them.

All the ‘usual suspects’ in terms of spelling were in evidence and there was some confusion around how to spell “ecstatic” and “humongous” which were seemingly the trending words this year. Several examiners also commented on the lack of paragraphing in some of the responses they marked.

Most candidates were able to navigate the writing section of the booklet and correctly completed their Task 1 response in the allocated space. Candidates who wrote their responses in the wrong space were not penalised for doing so and many, realising their error, clearly labelled their responses accordingly. A few made the mistake of writing a response to both tasks and this often resulted in those candidates running out of time.

Task 1(a)

As already indicated, this was the more popular option and while many responses were reflections on “Results Day”, crowning achievements in sporting activities or doing something to help their families were also well exploited by the candidature. The focus of the task allowed the opportunity for candidates of all levels of ability to write about something from their own experience and to communicate their thoughts and feelings about what happened.

The best responses were, of course, splendid pieces of work which were certainly not a chore to mark. It also has to be said, however, that examiners reported that there were emotional pieces at all levels of ability which twitched at their heart strings.

Task 1(b)

This task allowed many candidates to use their imaginations and to successfully demonstrate their creative writing skills. At the top of the ability range there were many plausible, singular and beautifully written responses which impressed with their sophisticated vocabulary and striking descriptive touches. Quite a few candidates used a flashback structure to develop the plot of their stories in an effective way.

The image, however, sparked what one examiner referred to as “wild imaginings” – apocalyptic scenarios; psychotic murderers, fantasy thrillers and even alien invasions. These narratives were invariably unrealistic and unconvincing. Several examiners felt that some candidates were drawn to write horror/sci-fi/other-world stories to deliberately target the specified teenage audience. Again, these were almost always highly improbable with ridiculous plotlines. The unfortunate children in the picture often did not survive for long, soon falling victim to tsunamis, kidnappers or “Scooby-Doo” style sea monsters suddenly emerging from the waves and carrying them off into fantastical underwater kingdoms. There were, however, quite a few first-person narratives that took the form of memories of going to the beach with family and many of these were successfully evocative and engaging to read.

Task 2

It is very encouraging to report that, overall, candidates clearly understood the requirements of this new task and were well prepared for its challenges. Teachers are to be commended for the unmistakable evidence of dedicated teaching and preparation at all levels of the ability range. There is always an increased level of anxiety about the outcomes of the first series with a new task but teachers can be reassured that their pupils performed better than was perhaps expected.

There were very many responses which demonstrated the skills of effective comparing and contrasting as well as interpreting, explaining and evaluating a range of relevant examples in a focused manner. The two stimulus texts were also very well received and felt to be accessible for the whole ability range.

Some candidates attempted to compare and contrast the brief synopsis offered for each text which were only intended to contextualise the situations the characters found themselves in. While it is not invalid to compare/contrast this “gloss”, most comments were understandably limited to a superficial level (such as, the fact that Andrea was alone/separated from her boyfriend while the other couple were travelling together). Some candidates pointlessly speculated about what the “argument” was about or why the couple were travelling to Budapest. Other candidates used this information as a lead into their first cross-reference which was a more worthwhile idea.

Some other points raised by examiners include:

- While most candidates were able to make solid cross-references regarding techniques such as the writers’ use of similes, characterisation and descriptive details, a consideration of how tension was developed in each piece through how they were structured was not as evident.
- Despite clear instructions about what to do, a small number of candidates compared and contrasted the two “selfie” texts for Tasks 3 and 4 instead of or as well as the texts printed on the insert.
- There was some misinterpretation of the narrative perspectives of the literary texts.
- A few candidates took a discursive approach and offered opinions and preferences about how well tension was created in both texts.

- There was a tendency to spend too long on this task and many candidates used additional answer pages.
- Quite a few candidates, including some who were clearly able, often defaulted into too much labelling of techniques with little in the way of analysis in order to be 'thorough' but would have been better advised to unpack several well considered and suitably supported cross-references in their assessments of the writers' intentions.
- On the whole, comparative connectives were well utilised.
- It was clear that some candidates had learned the techniques and why they are used in a general sense, but did not apply this knowledge to the two texts in a specific way in terms of exploring the writers' effects regarding how tension was created. There were some instances when candidates simply 'regurgitated' prepared chunks of analyses of literary techniques – some of which didn't have any relevance to either of the two stimulus texts.
- General comments were quite frequent (for example, 'This encourages the reader to read on' or 'This metaphor is interesting and makes the reader curious about what will happen next').
- As with GEN11, the confusion between 'contrast' and 'juxtaposition' was noted in several responses.

Task 3

Most candidates were clearly able to demonstrate their ability to identify and comment appropriately on a range of ways the writer gained and then held the interest of the reader at the beginning of her article. Astonishingly, some candidates ignored the headline so missing out on the opportunity to explain the role of the metaphorical language and tone used in capturing the audience from the start.

Top quality responses offered confident analysis of judiciously selected examples of the writer's use of structural and linguistic devices such as her use of punctuation, hyperbole, sentence types and sarcastic humour. Assured responses also presented precisely selected evidence and often demonstrated the confidence to be succinct in approach.

Predictably, the weakest responses were characterised by reporting the text and/or giving opinions about whether or not the writer succeeded in engaging the reader's interest. Some candidates seemed confused about whether the writer was being serious or humorous displaying a lack of understanding by taking her sarcastic/hyperbolic comments literally.

The following list of pitfalls would be useful to discuss with future candidates (these also apply to Task 4):

- "feature spotting" followed by vague general comments and/or repetition of the key terms of the task along the lines of "...and this also helps gain and hold the reader's interest" with no attempt to explain how this was achieved.
- Ignoring the focus of the task and, instead, writing a discursive piece on the subject matter of the stimulus text. Some clearly able candidates could not resist offering some personal opinions within the body of their responses. Such comments are a waste of time and cannot be credited.
- Another waste of valuable time is the tendency for some candidates to rewrite the task (often alongside a summary of how they intend to tackle the task) by way of an "introduction". Again, this is pointless and ultimately not worthy of credit.

Task 4

As with Task 3, the responses to this task often evidenced a high standard of preparation and, in general terms, the candidature seemed comfortable with regards to explaining how the writer created a negative view of the "selfie". Quite a few examiners felt that, overall, candidates were able to establish the focus of this task with more ease than that of the previous task about how the writer "gained and held" the reader's interest.

While a large number of candidates displayed an impressive command of technical vocabulary and knowledge of terminology, it is frustrating how many candidates consider the use of any question in a text to be rhetorical. Having said that, the writer's use of imagery in the first line, the verb "hypnotised", the anecdote about the "modern-day romance", the claim about cosmetic surgery and the series of short sentences and imperatives to conclude the article were all well plundered by candidates.

Candidates who became involved in responding to the writer's opinions in this section of the article, tended to get very exercised/defensive at the apparent "attack" on phones which they invariably deemed "a part of normal life" which the writer should just "get over"!

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