GCSE
ENGLISH/ENGLISH LANGUAGE

ENG1F Unit 1 Understanding and producing non-fiction texts
Report on the Examination

4700/4705
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General Comments

This was a reasonably large series, with approximately 90,000 candidate scripts to mark. Though we often see a very good level of preparedness for the vast majority of candidates, this year we had a significant shift in the demographic of the exam – with a larger number of candidates coming from the post 16 and FE sector. Perhaps coincidently, we also saw some of the same mistakes from earlier series' creeping back into the mix, indicating a lack of preparedness in the case of some candidates.

Just a reminder - this examination is marked online. This means that candidates' scripts are all scanned, each question is separated from the rest, and examiners receive those questions (items) in batches. We do not, as examiners, see whole scripts. As a result, one candidate may have up to seven markers marking different questions on their paper, which means centres are likely to have many experienced and accurate markers working to provide fair and accurate marks for their candidates. As we've advised before, it would benefit centres to look closely at their Item Level Analysis before submitting re-mark requests to identify where, on individual questions, a candidate may have an anomalous score. Bear in mind that if candidates have a dash instead of a mark, it means they have *not* attempted that question at all.

Additional Pages submitted by centres with their candidates' scripts continue to be a source of worry – particularly in disadvantaging candidates in terms of their timing. There is plenty of space in the booklet – in fact in some cases, far more than is required. Some candidates seem to have spent far too much time filling in two, three, four extra sheets with all their details, writing out the question number in every box down the side and then filling pages with more and more of the same quality work as is in the main answer.

Use of additional pages should be seen as a guarantor of marking by a senior examiner – this is not the case and consideration should be given to the input on time allocation for students, of using additional pages.

Question 1a
Fewer candidates achieved the four full marks this year – 58% compared to 75% last year – a good indicator that many candidates were simply not prepared for the exam. Where candidates encountered difficulties here, the issue came down to a failure to read the question properly. There was much random copying rather than making points about the Info Ladies e.g.' In Bangladesh, population 152 million'. It is important that copied points make a clear fact about the focus of the question – in this case the Info Ladies – so, for example, 'they criss-cross the countryside' was very borderline when out of context. Some more able candidates fell into the trap of making points that did not necessarily apply to all the info ladies e.g. they start at 6 am, highlighting the need for very careful reading of text and question, and for precise wording of answers.

Question 1b
Again this question allowed the vast majority of candidates to score 2 marks out of the available 4, with 53% doing just that. Candidates tended to either make statements with some inference but no support, or they offered supported statements, with no inference. However, there are four marks to be had here. Sharing the mark scheme ladder with students may help more candidates to remember to include *all three elements* of implicit reading. It is always useful advice to remind candidates to refer directly to the focus of the task in their statements and this year the focus was: "the work the 'info ladies' do in Bangladesh". Some candidates repeated the same information they used in 1a and did not focus on the work they do. Many candidates had learned to use the phrase

"this infers..." but sometimes the 'inference' was in fact a statement. An inference does not need to be flagged up as such but candidates do need to be taught the difference between making a statement that can be supported by a quotation, and an inference that shows they have thought about what the evidence suggests to the reader.

Question 2
The extract from the autobiography of Bradley Wiggins proved to be very accessible for many candidates and we saw candidates were using a clear method to approach the task. (The same method you would expect to see in Q1b but often don't!) Over 30% of responses scored 5 with statement and supporting quotations made and a further 18% scored 6 with the inclusion of an inference. The ones that went into band 3 with more inferences were usually good showing clear evidence that the text had been understood and the question had been read carefully. Many candidates had a good try at inferring something from the ideas they pointed out, with the idea that Bradley had been training the same way for fifteen years provoking some good implicit reading, in particular, about his levels of commitment and dedication to his sport.
Some weaker candidates repeated their statements or paraphrased large chunks of the text. We also saw many instances of copying out huge chunks of the text this year – which we haven't seen for a while. Twenty per cent of candidates did not make it out of Band 1 as a result of these types of responses, indicating perhaps that they did not have a method or means to demonstrate even basic comprehension skills in their terminal GCSE exam.

Question 3
The charity leaflet had a wealth of language features designed to persuade and inform the reader and those candidates who have been successfully taught to write to inform and write to persuade for Section B had a good handle on the kinds of techniques that might be used in a text of this type. Successful candidates again followed a clear structure, but this has to be supported with comments on effect, to hit the higher reaches of the mark scheme, otherwise marks did tend level off at 6.

Phrases such as "it makes the reader want to read on" or "it makes it flow" are generic and not actually about the text itself, so should be avoided. Candidates need to really be prepared to at least attempt some analysis of the effect of the language, rather than simply identifying which features are used. Using the indicative content from past mark schemes is a very good place to start to model the required skills.
They need to be aware that going into *detail* on two or three features is much more useful than trying to cover all features possible. The DAFOREST mnemonic and similar are deceptive in encouraging candidates to think they have covered what they need to.

Last year it was noted that, 'increasingly, candidates are becoming better at distinguishing between language and presentation features. Far fewer responses were irrelevant or simply not attempted.' (Report: June 2014) but bizarrely this year we seemed to have a regression on this. There were some responses where candidates wrote about presentational features instead. These could not be rewarded, so again this comes down to explicit teaching of the wording of the question and lots of practice in order to be able to answer this and question 4 appropriately. Others muddled up points about language and presentation and others simply wrote about content. We have not seen this problem in such quantities since 2011. Six-and-a-half per cent of candidates scored either 0 or missed this question out entirely.

Question 4
This remains a weaker question. To put it into context, 33% of candidates remained in Band 1 by repeating more of the same. In many cases, candidates could be writing about any two texts, not specifically about two texts printed on the paper. 'Source 1 has a bold headline that stands out and engages the reader and gives a clue as to what the article is about, whereas Source 3 does not use a headline … ' could actually be about any paper we have set since January 2011.
Precisely describing what is in each picture is a very helpful place to start. The pictures in source 3 provided much scope here and more able candidates commented on the photographs of the night ride, with the bikes in shadow and the lights leading the way, the choices of the midnight blue colours and the faces of the happy and relieved cyclists at the end of their journey celebrating their achievement. Other candidates noticed the balance of gender and race in the photographs, suggesting that the smiling couple at the end showed that the cycle ride was open to all and everyone could take part in an event like this and work together.

Some responses however, contained references to language features, which could not be rewarded, and again generic comments that are not tied to specific features of the texts could not be rewarded as anything other than "simple generalised comment". Many came equipped with ready-made comments to make about the use of green or blue. Candidates should be reminded that this has to be connected to specific effects to do with the text itself.

Still we have many candidates who filled all four pages in their answer booklet, but hit all their marks within the first two. This is an absolute disaster for candidates' timing for Q5 and 6.
Also, a costly waste of time are the opening paragraphs where candidates tell examiners what the two forms are, who the audiences are (often very tenuously) and what the purpose of each text is. Candidates are told what the forms are in the question paper and comments about audience and purpose would only be useful if connected precisely to comments on effect.

Question 5
The phrase "a good thing that you have done in your life" was interpreted in a variety of ways. Where candidates responded by writing about something that they have enjoyed, it limited their responses somewhat because they could not answer the second part, which asked them to explain "why it made a difference to others". Again, this suggested that many candidates did not read the question right to the end and highlight the purpose word for themselves (which is emboldened on the question paper).

Some candidates are still very unsure as to how to explain other than via a lengthy anecdote and there seems to be a distinct lack of confidence and awareness of techniques they might be able to use. This often lead to responses which were very long, and may have impacted on timing for Q6.

The most successful answers were from candidates who were able to draw on personal experiences: charity events completed at school or in the community, supporting a friend or relative, or turning over a new leaf at home or school all proved to be good sources of material for better responses.

Equally, many good answers imagined a situation such as helping a homeless person, for example. And, as one of these very frail old ladies approaching 50, I am reassured that there will be plenty of young people to help me pick up my shopping if I fall over in the street!

Some more technically minded candidates fully embraced the idea of writing a blog and addressed their computer literate followers in appropriately informal language, often including a web address or dates for further authenticity. Candidates need to be reminded that this form, like an article, can make use of a variety of paragraph lengths, sub-headings and other structural features. It is

surprising to still see many candidates who do not write in paragraphs at all, which is a key discriminator at the bottom of Band 2.

Question 6
This was done *extremely* well by most candidates, being a familiar form to any student who had listened in assemblies at school over the years and consequently meant most of the responses utilised an appropriate register. Forty-eight per cent of candidates achieved a mark of 11 or above on content and organisation, which was incredibly positive.

Many used the example of Bradley Wiggins, which was reasonable given the question, but this sometimes meant that approximately half of the writing was given over to a repetition of the original question, with embellishment from details in source 2. Better responses used examples from other high achieving celebrities the candidates knew of, and it was good to see candidates being confident enough to use a wide variety of these to demonstrate their point.
Others took on the persona of the head teacher – in some cases with amazingly sharp accuracy! Others wrote effectively as a 'fellow student' saying goodbye and motivating their colleagues.

Some candidates however, wrote far too much on Q6, and having covered all they needed to in 2 pages, seemed to feel they should continue until they were at the end of the paper. This led inevitably to repetition of the same points. Some planning at the start, just some pause for thought before starting to write, re-reading the question and spending just a few minutes thinking around different ideas, would be a good habit for all candidates.

AO3/AO4 iii
Candidates tended to receive marks at the upper end of Band 2 for both questions, as there was mainly correct demarcation, some correct use of commas, apostrophes and question marks and some accurate spelling including one or two complex words. Most of the weaker and shorter responses met all Band 1 criteria; in Band 2 some that made grammatical errors typical of second language learners were able to compensate by accurate use of a range of punctuation.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator