



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

NOVEMBER 2018

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE

General Certificate of Secondary Education

November 2018

UNIT 1

There was a small number of centres that used this series as a first entry for their candidates but the majority of entries were re-sit candidates from June 2018 with many carrying forward marks and hence the profile of the entry was quite varied. There was a significant number of centres who used the tasks for Responding and Interacting from the 2019 series rather than the topics from June 2018: 'Litter – how big a problem is it?', 'Should exotic animals be kept as pets?' or 'Work Experience for 15 and 16 year olds. What do you think?' It had been made very clear, both on the Unit 1 Task 2 cover sheet and in communications from WJEC that the tasks for the November 2018 series were the same as those from June 2018.

Administration

Pleasingly, there were fewer problems with recordings though a considerable number of centres failed to provide recordings on time which posed real problems for the moderators as the time frame was very limited.

Incomplete recordings, where a candidate has not undertaken both tasks, should be replaced with complete candidates' work. There were one or two instances of candidates' work being missing which were referred to WJEC for further investigation. Centres are reminded that all recordings must be securely stored.

More centres provided recordings on USB devices which were much more straightforward to access. In many cases candidates were very clearly identified at the beginning of their recording with either the candidate or a teacher giving the date of the recording, the centre number and name, the candidate's full name and examination number and the theme and topic of the presentation and the chosen task for the group discussion. This is a requirement which not all centres are adhering to, particularly regarding the date of the recordings. There were also a number of instances where individuals in groups were not identified which made assessment very difficult, especially with audio-only recordings.

There were still some centres where the group discussion used four, five or even six candidates and where speaker identification, when this was an audio recording, was difficult. There also appeared to be more centres using a paired situation for candidates, which in most cases was not helpful as there appeared to be little opportunity for real discussion.

Timings for the tasks were generally appropriate, though there were still instances of brevity in both tasks. There were fewer instances of tasks going significantly beyond the time frames required but this was still an issue which in most cases was self-penalising.

Yet again there were instances where the provision of notes and prompts were of concern. Some of the notes were far too detailed and amounted to scripts and, particularly, notes appeared to have been used but not sent to the moderator. This applied mostly to audio recordings where it was clear that pages or cards were being turned. There were also still instances where group discussions were heavily prepared and scripted. Once again may I remind centres that, for the Individual Researched Presentation 'It is not permissible for the presentation to be scripted. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate'. For Group Discussions, it is also clearly stated that 'No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.'

In general the record sheets were detailed and used a combination of criteria related comment and task/candidate specific comment. The best used examples of some of the vocabulary used and, for the group discussions which were audio recordings, often gave the opening words of the candidate or noted whether they spoke first, second etc., which was very helpful.

Task setting

Individual Researched Presentations.

The full range of topics was used, with 'Science and technology' probably being the most popular. There were some very interesting presentations on such areas as cyber-bullying, robotics, internet addiction, limiting screen time for children and the impact of A.I. on lives. The impact and influence of social media was also debated. There were also some assured presentations on such areas as animal testing and global warming.

'Wales' was used by some to look at the impact of the Welsh Baccalaureate, sporting provision in Wales and defence or opposition to teaching of the Welsh language. There were some who highlighted Wales as a tourist destination – though this latter topic did tend to be reduced to lists of places to visit.

'The World of Work' again proved interesting to candidates with some speaking about their ambitions in areas such as catering, hairdressing or construction.

'Leisure' was also popular, with topics as wide-ranging as motocross, carpentry, paintballing, skiing, rollercoasters, Army cadets, cricket and other sporting areas. It was often the case that less able candidates used this option as it allowed them to speak confidently about an area of which they were knowledgeable. Generally speaking it is not a good option for those aspiring to reach Band 5, though occasionally this is possible when there is a clear sense of persuasion and evaluation within the task.

'Citizenship' was again less popular but clearly engaged some candidates in topics as diverse as considering re-introducing the death penalty, possible amendment of the laws concerning drugs, leaving the E.U., child marriage, homelessness, mental health issues and freedom of speech.

There were a few occasions when candidates had been steered towards specific topics such as legislation surrounding dangerous dogs, war or puppy farming. It is generally preferable to allow candidates some freedom to select a topic of personal interest as this tends to evoke more enthusiasm and knowledge.

There were, again, examples of presentations which clearly evoked strong interest from the candidate but which were difficult to place in a category. These included a talk on the influence of Adolf Hitler in Germany.

Despite messages to the contrary and exemplar materials used in CPD meetings, there are still far too many candidates who are being allowed to use very detailed prompts or scripts which are clearly being read. Should this occur, candidates marks will be adversely affected, but, ideally, they should be given guidance on how to use brief prompts. Also, there is a tendency to think that many statistics are needed to support their opinions and often these add little to the overall piece. An honest and enthusiastic presentation on a topic of personal interest is the best option rather than a topic which requires much research and is really of little concern to the candidate.

Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion)

It was pleasing to note that many more of the group discussions limited the group sizes to three candidates (although, disappointingly, there were still examples of groups of five or six) and also mixed the groups rather than having single sex groups. There were some centres which provided audio-visual recordings for this task which made identification of the participants very straightforward. However, there were still far too many examples of discussions which had clearly been rehearsed and sometimes read as polite exchanges with very detailed scripts being used. This is an area which has been highlighted many times and the Instructions for Teachers is absolutely clear: 'No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task'. Where groups were able to interact more freely, genuine exchanges of views were apparent.

There were some occasions when teachers intervened – sometimes after a very short initial exchange – to promote more discussion. This clearly can be helpful to less able or less confident candidates.

There were a number of examples of candidates working in a paired situation, which was often limiting. This was especially the case when a teacher was involved as the candidates seemed to find it difficult to express an opinion.

All three topics were used with perhaps more candidates looking at 'Litter – how big a problem is it?' There was some thoughtful debate, especially fuelled by the recent 'Blue Planet' series, with candidates using material about pollution of the seas alongside comments about their own neighbourhoods and commenting on attitudes to littering.

'Should exotic animals be kept as pets?' was also widely used, though this tended to become a little less engaging than the litter topic. Sometimes candidates developed ideas about the advantages such as protection of endangered species.

'Work Experience for 15 and 16 year olds. What do you think?' was the least popular, but candidates certainly had strong views, though it seemed many were speaking theoretically as they had not had such an opportunity.

This area is still one where candidates need practice in interacting with each other and learning how to sustain an argument. The over-reliance on detailed notes and the increased use of actual scripts is a worrying development in an area which is a real life-skill for candidates and also furnishes them with the ability to make and sustain an argument. This is a transferable skill for the written papers and certainly an area which would benefit from more practice and less detailed preparation.

Assessment

Overall the assessments were generally sound and there was clearly some attempt to moderate the recordings before marks were submitted in some cases. Where there were discrepancies these arose because marks did not always reflect brevity of performances or reading of scripts. Audio-visual recordings were transparent and generally much more accurately assessed. Audio recordings frequently did not recognise the reading of material in the marks awarded.

Candidates who gave an Individual Researched Presentation lasting under two minutes and then answered one or two straightforward questions were unlikely to achieve marks above the lower end of Band 3 at best. Similarly, a member of a Group Discussion who only made two or three brief contributions – often as a result of there being too many people in the group or because it was a brief discussion – cannot move beyond Band 2 marks. In these instances, marks were often very generously awarded. Candidates who did little more than provide information on a topic were also often generously rewarded when there was little or no evidence of evaluation or analysis – skills required for Band 3 and above.

Allowing candidates to select topics of personal interest and encouraging good practice in terms of use of brief notes for the Individual Researched Presentation is still an area for improvement. For the Group Discussion, candidates need to practise the art of arguing and discussing with each other in order to develop this essential life skill.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

General Certificate of Secondary Education

November 2018

UNIT 2

Theme: The National Health Service

Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. In overview, candidates were provided with five reading texts of different types for this examination. All were based on the theme of the National Health Service.

This was the fourth Unit 2 examination of the new specification. There was a range of question types and the texts provided a balance of continuous and non-continuous writing in relation to the National Health Service. Candidates applied themselves to this examination unit with obvious effort and enthusiasm. The theme appeared to interest the vast majority and, in many cases, strong personal engagement with the reading material was in evidence.

The Question Paper Evaluation Committee had considered the requirements of the full range of abilities represented across the untiered candidature. As expected, and as has happened with previous examinations in this specification, the texts proved accessible, to varying degrees, for the majority of candidates. There was a small minority who were less effective in approach, perhaps proving unsuccessful in the timing of the examination or unwilling to apply themselves to some or all of the materials presented. These candidates were infrequently seen by examiners.

Reading

A1 What is Park Hospital in Manchester known as today?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

This was a straightforward location question intended to enable candidates to immediately engage with the information presented in Text A. The text type, a website page which described the beginnings of the National Health Service, was straightforward in the provision of historical information and provided insight and overview to the theme of the paper. The majority of candidates answered the question successfully – the answer 'Trafford General Hospital' was easily located in the opening paragraph of the text. This question was designed to ease candidates into the examination. It enabled them to engage with the text and theme, locate the pertinent detail and answer the question with straightforward information.

A2 Which one of the following statements is NOT correct? Tick (✓) that box.

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.

This question proved reasonably straightforward. It was a multiple-choice question and required candidates to isolate the statement about the NHS that was incorrect. All of the alternatives featured in the text and thus proved credible distractors, providing, as they did, correct information about the NHS. It was essential that candidates read the question carefully and were sure of what information they were being asked for in addition to carefully reading the text. In some cases, candidates failed to read the instructions adequately and tried to tick multiple options. In these circumstances, no mark was awarded.

A3 Name two of the services that came together for the first time as part of the NHS.

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Again, this was a straightforward question intended to provide accessible information to the candidates in relation to the theme. The expectation was that most candidates would achieve well here and this proved to be the case with most able to accumulate marks. Candidates were awarded one mark for each appropriate answer, up to a total mark of two. This question was attempted by the majority of candidates. Incorrect answers were rare but appeared to occur where candidates had not understood the question. In these cases, it appeared that the word 'services' may not have been understood and candidates may have isolated two more random words from the text in order to provide an answer. As the word 'services' was used within the text retrieving the information should not have been problematic.

A4 What is meant when Aneurin Bevan is referred to as “a great British statesman”?

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.

This question was asked in relation to Text B, which although brief, was a more challenging piece of continuous piece of writing. This was presented as a multiple-choice question and it was essential that candidates read the text carefully. The third answer, 'He was a respected political leader', was the correct answer, and this could be inferred from a careful reading of the text. The distractors provided information that was incorrect, that could not be proved or that did not provide an adequate explanation to the statement in the question. Candidates who did not have a prior knowledge of the word 'statesman' but who worked through all of the options, using sensible reading skills to discount the distractors, were able to succeed. The correct answer was by far the most popular choice for candidates but all of the distractors were selected at some point, with the accurate statement that he was 'responsible for creating the NHS' being the second most popular choice. It was intended that this question offer more challenge to candidates and require the application of higher-level reading skills and this proved to be the case.

A5 What was the main aim of the NHS?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

This was intended to be a straightforward question and candidates were expected to isolate the relevant information within the text. The main aim of the NHS, according to Text B was 'to provide care that is free, based on need and regardless of wealth'. Some candidates copied this entire quotation directly from the text and some elected to engage with the principles suggested in their own words. Both of these approaches could result in success and many will have achieved here. There were a number of candidates who were too brief in approach and failed to engage with the whole of the quotation, most electing to only focus on the fact that the NHS is 'free'. These answers were insufficiently detailed and were not able to access the marks available.

A6 How does this text convey the size of the modern-day NHS?

This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within texts and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.

There were several pieces of evidence available for selection which would enable candidates to demonstrate their ability to refer to appropriate evidence within the text. Selections in relation to the NHS's budget of 'over £108 billion', the fact that it is the world's 'largest publicly funded health service', that it employs 'more than 1.7 million' and provides health care to 'over 63 million people' were amongst the most often quoted. This question was intended to provide additional challenge through the requirement to explain and/or analyse the information presented. Those candidates who were able to offer a valid explanation of their chosen evidence, and how they were using it to answer the set question, were able to achieve full marks. Those candidates who did not demonstrate the ability to engage fully with the question and evidence, instead mostly offering understanding through their selection skills, could only access one of the two marks on offer.

A7 Approximately, what percentage of patients did not attend their appointment in 2015?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

This was the first question set on Text C. It was deliberately straightforward in order to provide candidates with the opportunity to access clear information in what was quite a complex non-continuous text. To ensure they answered this question correctly, candidates needed to make sure they were clear and precise in response. The majority were able to do this. The question deliberately used the word 'approximately' so that it did not matter whether candidates used it or not in their answer. The requirement was that they isolated the figure of 8%. In a few cases candidates focused on an incorrect figure such as '300,000' or '24,000 lost opportunities' and it was clear that they had not fully engaged with the question. As expected, these instances were few and far between.

A8 Explain why you think this poster was produced?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in interpreting meaning and ideas.

This question was intended to challenge candidates to provide an explanation of why this poster was produced. An ability to look beyond the immediate information and understand the poster's intended audience and aims would certainly be helpful in formulating a correct response. Many candidates attempted this question with varying levels of success. Most common were the correct suggestions that this was a text that had been produced to persuade people to attend appointments (or conversely to stop them from missing them) or that this was a poster produced to reduce wasted spending for the NHS. Both of these answers were appropriate and an awareness of both would have enabled a candidate to achieve the marks on offer. Many candidates elected to only discuss one reason for the production of the poster and were self-limiting as a result. A few candidates suggested that this was a poster that had been produced to advertise the success of the text reminder system and this was also considered worthy of credit. Some candidates struggled to engage with the requirements of this question and took the wrong angle in their response – many chose to reiterate the data presented, or describe the information presented by the text. This did not answer the question and was not worthy of credit.

A9 List three things that would contribute to Dr. Tony Copperfield having ‘one of those days’.

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and interpret meaning.

Candidates focused on Text D to answer this question. This was designed to be a straightforward task which was intended to provide candidates with an opening into this longer continuous text with all of the answers being accessible from one early paragraph in the text. The vast majority were able to correctly identify three relevant details. One mark was given for each correct ‘thing’ up to a total of three marks.

The most common obstacle to accumulating marks occurred when candidates were too brief or non-specific with the information presented. For example, some wrote merely ‘visit book’ rather than it was the fact that the visit book was ‘on to its third page’ or ‘the TV doctor’ rather than it was the ‘advice’ given by the ‘TV doctor’ that was important. Other errors occurred where candidates misread the information, for example, stating that Copperfield was ‘late for three meetings’ rather than ‘late for the first of three meetings’. Occasionally candidates overlapped information or details in their answer which may have decreased the marks available to them, or they brought in information from later in the text which demonstrated that they had not set the quote in the question into context and fully understood what they were being asked to do. Those candidates who read the question carefully and sensibly tracked the text were at an advantage.

A10 What are Dr Tony Copperfield’s thoughts and feelings about his job?

This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within the text and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.

As expected, this question proved to be one of the more challenging questions on the paper. Despite this, there was no shortage of effort with most candidates writing at significant length in their attempts to provide a full answer. Those candidates who engaged thoroughly with the text and kept the question firmly in mind generally produced successful responses. The question required candidates to comment on a range of Dr Tony Copperfield’s thoughts and feelings about his job. The best answers sustained careful focus on the question, providing a clear range of thoughts and feelings. Some thoughts and feelings were more explicitly presented in the text and could be reported on in a fairly straightforward manner. Others required candidates to engage with implicit meaning, perhaps exploring the varying and, at times, potentially contradictory ideas presented. An awareness of the tone of the piece and Copperfield’s use of humour was beneficial for higher-level candidates who explored some of the more complex ideas presented by the text. Candidates who were unable to sustain a focus on the question, generally those who copied large chunks from the text or decided to offer their own thoughts and feelings, struggled to accumulate marks. Those candidates who misinterpreted the text and tried to convince the examiner that Copperfield’s thoughts and feelings towards the job were wholly negative also struggled to make much progress.

- A11 This text refers to the need “to ensure a sustainable healthcare system for the future”. Which of the following definitions best fits the word “sustainable” in this context?**

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.

This question was asked in relation to Text E, which was a non-continuous text containing some complex ideas in relation to the future of the NHS. The question was presented as a multiple-choice task and it was essential that candidates read the question, possible answers and text carefully. Understanding the context of the word “sustainable” was all-important and those candidates who drew upon other associations they might have had may have been tempted to a different answer. It was clear that most candidates had been taught to focus carefully on reading in context for this type of question and this proved successful for the vast majority. There was a pleasing success rate for this question.

- A12 Synthesise the information from Text C, Text D and Text E to show the difficulties faced by the NHS.**

This question tested the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text, interpret themes, meaning and ideas in a text and to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse details.

This question was one of the more challenging questions on the paper given the necessity for the candidates to range across three texts and compile specific information. Although Text D was a relatively lengthy text it was felt that this was offset by the inclusion of two rather shorter non-continuous texts. The attempt rates for this question, particularly given its location towards the end of the Reading section, were very positive. Most candidates proved able to access at least some of the required information with an awareness of the requirements of the question.

When answering a synthesis question, there is no requirement for candidates to cite the text of their focus but, as with previous papers, many appeared to do this in order to aid the organisation of their answer. Either approach is valid and examiners were instructed to expect candidates to take different routes to success here.

In Text C the difficulties faced by the NHS related to the number of people who missed appointments and the impact that this had financially and in terms of the opportunities to care for patients. Most candidates were able to access some of this information. Text D provided more of a challenge and candidates needed to use more interpretative skill and inference to relate some of Dr Copperfield’s points to the potential difficulties faced by the NHS. However, many were able to access the fact that GPs had a challenging job or faced many difficulties, for a wide variety of reasons, and were able to make some headway through that point. Text E, had a clear focus on the difficulties faced by the NHS and there was plenty of information available for selection and/or comment. Those who demonstrated a clear understanding of the points they were compiling usually performed best.

There seemed fewer candidates who attempted to offer comparative points in answer to this question but, as with previous examinations, those who did so often wasted valuable time. It is also the case that taking a comparative approach often leads a candidate away from the point of the question.

A13 Read the sentence below then answer the questions which follow:
Whilst walking in the woods, Erin fell and a her hip and had to be b to the emergency ward of the hospital by ambulance.

- (a) **Circle** the word below that best fits gap a:
bounced mended soothed injured
- (b) **Circle** the word below that best fits gap b:
left taken rescued treated

This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out the appropriate word choice in the context of the sentence presented. The success rates suggested that the majority of candidates were able to complete this activity with few problems. Although more than one of the words may have been grammatically correct, the skill in editing was shown through selecting the answer which made the most sense.

Pleasingly, there appeared to be fewer issues with candidates not making their choices clear in this series. If candidates failed to circle the correct words but wrote them in to the gaps they were also credited. Occasionally candidates circled words but then wrote different ones into the gaps and clearly these could not be considered worthy of credit.

A14 **Circle the pair of words the best fit the meaning of the sentence below:**
Mrs Jones felt genuine.....that they had missed the doctor's appointment, whereas Billy, her son, was..... at the unexpected hour of freedom.

This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.

Again, this question tested a candidate's ability to work out which answers were the best fit in the context of the sentence presented. Given the use of this question type on several of the Specimen Assessment Materials, and its appearance on the first Unit 2 paper of this Specification (Summer 2017), candidates should have been prepared to select the pair of words which provided the clearest meaning when inserted into the question. Again, this did not prove problematic for the majority and success rates were encouraging. Barriers to success arose when candidates did not follow the instructions of the question in the presentation of their answer. A few, for example, elected to ignore the pairings and the instruction to circle, and wrote their answers into the blank spaces. Where the right answers were selected, examiners were instructed to mark these as correct. Where candidates did not select the right words, for example, if they chose words from different pairings, an accurate response to the question was not given and could not be credited.

A15 Read the text below which consists of sentences in the wrong order and show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:

1. Both patients and visitors had asked for fresh air to be allowed to circulate.
2. It was bitterly cold outside the hospital.
3. However, the heat on the ward was almost unbearable.
4. One woman seemed to have given up though and resorted to frantically fanning herself with a spare magazine.
5. This was because all windows remained closed, regardless of the numerous requests that they be opened.

(a) Which sentence should come third in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.

(b) Which sentence should come fifth in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.

This question tested the ability to understand texts at text level.

As with the previous questions of this type, to answer successfully candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences in order to see which sentences fit best into the required locations. Looking at the sentences individually it was possible to come up with various orders which would appear to make sense. The requirement was to choose the order in which the meaning made the most sense. Again, there was some challenge here, but many candidates proved able to determine at least one of these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. It was bitterly cold outside the hospital.
2. However, the heat on the ward was almost unbearable.
3. This was because all windows remained closed, regardless of the numerous requests that they be opened.
4. Both patients and visitors had asked for fresh air to be allowed to circulate.
5. One woman seemed to have given up though and resorted to frantically fanning herself with a spare magazine.

Proof Reading

B1 In this question, as with previous proof reading tasks, candidates were asked to read a text, circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.

This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The text was presented as an unbroken paragraph of continuous writing. Most candidates were able to detect some errors here although some stumbled a little with words that were correct but clearly unfamiliar to them, such as 'inundated'. In a situation where unfamiliar vocabulary arises, it would be worth candidates reading through the whole text to ascertain whether there are five errors in addition to the word that seems unfamiliar. Another barrier to success here was that some candidates identified the error correctly and possibly even proved able to alter the part of the word that was incorrect but added in errors elsewhere which rendered the answer unworthy of credit. For example, some candidates identified 'patience' as an error but rewrote it either as 'patients' or 'patient' both of which would be incorrect (albeit for different reasons). It is essential that the correction be written exactly as it should appear in the text. Corrections that appear with unnecessary capital letters, for example, would also be incorrect in the context of where they would have appeared in this text.

Writing

B2 Candidates were given the choice of which task to complete for this question. They were able to choose between:

- (a) Write an account of a visit to a dentist or doctor's surgery.
- (b) NHS staff, such as doctors and nurses, provide excellent service in difficult circumstances. Write an essay to explain your views on this subject, giving clear reasons and examples.

Both writing tasks proved accessible to candidates and there was no shortage of effort or content in what was on offer for either piece. The narrative writing of Task A produced some really enjoyable accounts often built around the feelings of the narrator. The vast majority elected to write about their own personal experience of a visit to the doctor or dentist. Overall, the dentist appeared to provoke more fear and anguish in the anticipation of the visit than the doctor. Better writing tended to demonstrate a clear awareness of structure with appropriately developed content that sought to engage a reader. There was no right or wrong way to approach this task, the production of a well-written, engaging piece of writing was the desired outcome. The task was deliberately worded to allow for candidates who wished to write about accompanying a friend or relative or other interpretation of the instruction. Clear and fluent writing was all-important.

Task B was an exposition task and this also produced some very detailed responses. Candidates were engaged by the task and some were able to effectively draw upon their own experiences to write convincingly on the subject. Some candidates did use the materials from the reading section as a 'springboard' which often worked well, although those who were overly reliant on them without having given due thought to their content were likely to struggle. In some cases, candidates appeared to have opted for this task with enthusiasm but then seemed to run out of things to write about. These were often the candidates who had not taken advantage of the planning space, or, where used, had done so very briefly. This type of writing really benefits from thinking through the direction of the essay before commencement.

As with previous examinations, timing did not appear to be a problem and the vast majority of candidates were able to write in some detail. Where very brief work or incomplete work was produced, this tended to be self-penalising. Candidates who wrote with little sense of either of the set tasks, perhaps writing in response to something they had faced previously or putting forward work that was pre-prepared, also struggled to make much progress and this will have been reflected particularly in the marks given for Communication and Organisation. Another problem which is perhaps increasing is an over-reliance on the material from the reading section. Candidates who use what they have read to inform their writing are often sensible and use their reading judiciously to inform and add credibility to their work. However, those who 'borrow' extensively, whether copying out entire texts or whole sentences or paragraphs from texts, are doing themselves a real disservice. This is not their own work, it affects the fluency and coherence of their own work, and it significantly compromises the extent to which the candidate can achieve.

Once again, errors in written accuracy proved a significant area of concern and it became clear that this may have been a recurring issue for many of those who were re-sitting this qualification. Written work which is characterised by numerous errors, a struggle to control tense and agreement, or an inability to punctuate with control and coherence, will struggle to progress through the Bands of the Assessment Criteria. Candidates who come with a pre-prepared checklist of punctuation and devices to use sometimes overlook the basics, this negates all of the more 'sophisticated' elements they try to introduce because the coherence of their writing is so compromised. Examiners are certain that limited written accuracy is the most significant factor affecting candidates who do not achieve their desired mark.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

General Certificate of Secondary Education

November 2018

UNIT 3

Theme: Beaches

Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 3 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. For this examination, candidates were provided with five different reading texts. All were based on the theme of beaches.

With a range of text types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical GCSE English language examination. Across the paper there were no question types that had not been seen in a previous examination series or the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs). Although most candidates are familiar with beaches, prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being tested or the achievement of outcomes. The texts provided readers with some opposing views about beaches although most agreed that litter causes chaos for these areas of great natural beauty.

Although this was predominantly a re-sit cohort, some year 11 candidates had been entered early for the examination. Across the whole ability range, it was evident that the majority were working diligently. As with all examinations, a small minority did not use their time effectively, but in most cases, there was no shortage of effort.

Reading

A1 What is the lifespan of a crisp packet that is dumped on a beach?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Text A, produced by Fresher Coasts, was an accessible text which allowed all candidates to immediately engage with the theme. The text gave a relatively even balance of illustrations and text and most candidates did not struggle to identify the information required to successfully answer questions 1-4.

The first question was an introduction to the theme and was relatively straightforward. Most candidates managed to answer successfully and efficiently. Not only were candidates able to locate the phrase 'crisp packets' but they were also helped by the illustration accompanying this specific piece of evidence. It was perfectly acceptable to copy down the answer directly from the text. Candidates who did not manage to gain credit for this question usually had not read the question correctly or copied down the numbers inaccurately.

A2 What percentage of marine litter ends up on beaches?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Taken from the opposite side of the text to question 1, this question also tested a candidate's ability to locate a key detail from the text. If candidates located the phrase 'marine litter' they then had to read the following few lines to locate the correct answer, 15%. As candidates were given the word, 'percentage' in the question, those who simply wrote down the correct number (15) were also rewarded. A minority were a little careless in either their reading of the text or the question and failed to write down the correct number (often writing down 70% - the amount of marine litter which sinks to the seabed).

A3 How many sea birds die each year due to marine litter?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills, to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

The information required to answer this question correctly was part of a title at the top of the second text box. The writing was in bold large print and the majority were able to locate this piece of information. Occasionally a candidate included statistical evidence based on the number of seals and whales, but most were able to write down the correct number. Again, careful reading is imperative across all questions as candidates do make careless errors with some relatively straightforward location questions.

A4 What is meant by 'to ingest'?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

This was the first multiple-choice question to feature on the paper. Five possible answers were provided for candidates to choose from. As with all multiple-choice questions, credible distractors were included to increase the demand and challenge. Candidates who referred to the text could probably work out that 'ingest' was something different to 'entanglement' and could perhaps determine from the 'in' that this was something to do with an internal process. While most gave correct answers, there were some who made it difficult to determine what their final choice was. Despite giving clear messages at CPD events, in webinar sessions and in all previous reports, candidates continue to choose to tick multiple boxes for these responses are not credited. Candidates who correct their answers must take care to ensure such corrections are both clear and legible.

A5 Text B gives advice to people on how to remain safe when visiting a beach. Put these stages into the order in which you should complete them.

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills when sequencing information.

Text B was produced with the sole intention of promoting beach safety. A series of steps were included to suggest the actions which are required to remain safe whilst on a beach. These steps were not in chronological order (i.e. in the order in which they should be followed) and it was the job of the candidate to sequence the information correctly. To answer successfully, candidates had to determine the most likely order of steps. The second answer had been completed to help candidates towards success.

Some candidates try to complete this question type at speed and tend to scan the first word of each section to look for obvious literal clues. This approach is not always helpful and candidates who read the whole text box undoubtedly help themselves. With box 2 eliminated, candidates should have been able to detect the 'before you set off' contained within the top right-hand side text box. However, if they were to think logically, it stands to reason that before setting off to an unfamiliar beach, some level of 'research' would be required to give information about that beach. The final box began with 'during your visit' which would logically make that the fourth box (they would finally be in situ). Candidates would then be able to work out that they ought to 'research...before you set off.... on arrival...then during your visit'. While most chose the correct sequence, there were some who did not manage to answer correctly. In many cases this was perhaps due to not reading carefully.

Some candidates were careless in their application of numbers (for example numbering their responses 1-3, or 2-5, rather than 1, 3 and 4). Some candidates used the same number on more than one occasion (2, 1, 2 and 3) which is difficult to credit. Most candidates who used a word processor still chose to hand write this answer in the answer booklet, a decision that ensured their answer was clearly and accurately presented. Others (also word processing) who tried to sequence the information and then present it using different numbers/letters to the original text, often became confused and sometimes struggled to gain reward.

It is worth reinforcing the message that candidates who complete any rough work to help them answer this question, should do so in the space below the question or in the text booklet. Several candidates who tried to work out the sequence in their answer space, made errors, and then struggled to communicate their final answer clearly.

A6 Explain why you think you can trust the information in this text.

This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing and to understand and recognise the reliability of texts.

Similar to the SAMs paper about 'Cash' where candidates were asked to consider 'how this payday loan company makes itself sound responsible and trustworthy,' this question tested the ability to consider the reliability of a text.

Answers varied enormously for this question. Most successful candidates focused on the fact that the information has been produced by a reputable organisation with the official royal seal, making it difficult to question the reliability of the text. The word 'reliable' featured in many answers as candidates seemed to associate 'trust' with 'reliability' and when carefully linked to the text, they usually gained credit for such comments. A number of candidates were also able to cite the fact that the text uses official government recognised websites to support their claims or as a vehicle to gain extra information, and were credited. Some candidates focused on the bias of the text and the fact that the purpose of the article (to promote safe practices) made it more reliable as it was not the intention to dupe readers but to save lives.

While many candidates were able to achieve one of the possible two marks available for this question, it was more difficult to achieve the second. The question was aimed to challenge and discriminate between achievement and was successful in its aim.

A7 Summarise why Barafundle Bay has been named one of the best beaches in the world.

This question tested the ability to summarise information.

Text C was an article taken from ITV News about Wales' best beach. The purpose of the article was to celebrate the achievement of Barafundle Bay, to promote its recognition on a global scale and to share the qualities which make it one of the finest beaches in the world. The text gave some information about both the general location of the beach and the beach itself.

Across the examination series, summary has proved itself to be a challenging question. A good deal of input has been given at CPD/webinar sessions and in all Principal Examiner Reports to convey a clear message about the most successful approach to summary.

Feedback from the examining team for this question suggests that the main issue with summary is that many candidates simply do not summarise. Many insist on using an 'evidence-explain' approach, which is wholly inappropriate for a summary or include lengthy quotations and copying huge swathes of text (most of which is irrelevant). It is clear which candidates have grasped summary skills as they produce concise and clear responses.

In terms of presenting answers, a number had been taught to use bullet points to present their information and these proved to be helpful. Not only did bullet points serve as a helpful tool for encouraging clarity of thought and organisation, but they also appeared to encourage candidates to write briefly. Bullet points are not a pre-requisite for success but for those who are tempted to overwrite, they can be helpful. Candidates who are most successful at this question usually have an incisive ability to produce an overview and this skill undoubtedly helps them when tackling other questions.

When summarising this text, we allowed seven different areas, which could be covered in a response. Candidates who covered one of the bullet point areas would be given credit and examiners were trained to expect alternative wording as part of successful responses. Across the cohort, candidates predominantly commented on the private/tranquil/peaceful aspect of Barafundle Bay and the beauty of the actual beach. Some were also able to pick out some of the more dramatic features of the beach and its surrounding area. It is worth stressing to candidates that they will be helped by adopting a chronological approach to their own reading/analysis of the text but that answers can be presented in any order.

A8 In text C, the writer states that the cliffs are 'dropping precipitously close to the sea.' What is meant by the word 'precipitously'?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

Candidates are familiar with word meaning questions. For this question, candidates were given a phrase and were asked to give the meaning of one of the words. The examining team were genuinely impressed by the determination demonstrated by candidates who were keen to give this question a good try. We hoped that the 'dropping...to the sea' would aid candidates who may be able to see that something steep was being described and this was clearly the case for a significant number. Across the ability range, we saw a wide range of valid responses with candidates seeing both the severity of the drop, the danger it posed, or its gradient.

Some tried to offer a range of suggestions and this was not a sensible approach especially for those who managed to undo a potentially correct answer. For example, one wrote, 'there is a gentle steepness' and 'the slope is mild but dangerous'. Such contradictory responses were difficult to credit. Overall, however, we were genuinely impressed by the commitment of candidates and their willingness to attempt this challenging question.

A9 How does the writer persuade the reader to choose a holiday in Wales?

This question tested the ability to use inference and deduction skills, to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.

The 'how' question is one that challenges the full range of abilities. Text D was a natural choice for a 'how' question as it was rich in both technique and content and allowed all candidates to engage with its aims. The text was an advertisement and its purpose was never in doubt. Produced by Lyons Holiday Parks, the text was notably persuasive with a wealth of positive comments to encourage potential tourists to choose Wales for their holiday destination. The text focused on some beaches, found in north Wales, and also described some of the many attractions including food and drink. There was also an appeal to families with dogs, which many of the candidates focused on.

The text was so overwhelmingly persuasive and positive that there really was no excuse for a candidate not to focus on the content of the passage. Unfortunately, there were some who produced technique driven responses which showed no real understanding of the text or the task. Rather than referencing the following, 'Who doesn't love the now world-renowned Welsh cake...?' and stating that the rhetorical question whets the appetite of anyone interested in food or culture who may wish to try new things (with the rhetorical technique making it difficult to refuse), some candidates wasted a significant amount of time merely writing hypothetically about questions and their generic role in a persuasive text. The same can be said for language, some candidates opted to comment on the use of pronouns but did not really link these to the text whereas others focused on the 'your fill of blissful beaches...' where the pronoun directed the reader to consider the extent to which the beaches could be enjoyed by them personally.

As commented in the previous report, 'How' can be answered in different ways. This question does not intend to encourage a relentless hunt for technical devices (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question), particularly when some usually identify devices correctly but have a limited sense of how they work and even then, they do not always link them to the relevant section of text/evidence. 'How' questions instead aim to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer's arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader (any techniques used when conveying their messages can be mentioned and explored, where relevant, but should not be commented on at the expense of clarity and focus). Many who make a decent attempt when answering this question do so by mainly concentrating on the content of the passage. Additionally, those who work chronologically through the text often produce more coherent and methodical responses. Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information. The very best answers respond to language and consider the way in which the writer's argument develops (with a constant eye to the question).

A10 What is meant by the term ‘refundable deposit’?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

This was a relatively straightforward multiple-choice question which most candidates managed to answer successfully. The phrase in question was located in the second paragraph of the text and those who found it and read the information in context would have found further details to help them answer this question successfully. With four possible answers to choose from, it was possible to eliminate the first distractor by simply reading the text carefully, therefore leaving uncertain candidates with only three options.

A11 What evidence is given in the text to show that some of the beaches in Britain are ‘poor’?

This question tested the ability to use and interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.

As per June 2018 when we saw a similar question on the topic of ‘Selfies’, this question was relatively straightforward. This time, the text was more challenging, and candidates had to read carefully to elicit a range of ideas from the text. With a wealth of information and factual evidence included, candidates were required to work or track their way through this text to locate a range of details as evidence to highlight that some of the beaches are poor. To achieve more than one or two marks, it was essential that candidates sought to include a range of details in their responses. Those who found this to be a challenging text often included a few details or statistics about the types of litter found but were less purposeful and selective than those who carefully tried to cite a range of different reasons to support their claims.

Examiners were given seven possible areas of coverage in the mark scheme but within these areas there was room to include some valid alternatives. Some became a little tangled when trying to separate the different countries within the UK but most focused aptly on ‘Britain’.

A12 What was the second most common type of rubbish found dumped on UK beaches?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

The final multiple-choice question for November 2018 asked candidates to read Text E closely and to work out which type of rubbish was the second most common type to be found. The information was found in the third paragraph and those who skimmed through the passage looking for the word ‘second’ will have come across this answer. Perseverance is required for some candidates when they face lengthier texts, like this one. This was not a difficult question and those who were unsuccessful may have not read closely enough.

A13 Compare what the writers of Text C, Text D and Text E say about beaches in Wales.

This question tested the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and to compare and evaluate the texts.

This was the first time that a comparison question had been set across three texts and the approach was largely a success. When candidates compare three texts as opposed to two, their analysis of each individual texts is slightly reduced and they also have three chances to demonstrate their understanding rather than two. Texts C and D were overwhelmingly positive and relatively straightforward whereas Text E was overwhelmingly negative and although packed with detail and a more challenging read than the other two, it was possible to extract some clear headlines from the text.

The key to successfully answering a comparison question is to read the question carefully. The question will always give candidates a steer on what they need to compare. In this series, candidates were asked to compare what each text says about beaches in Wales. Another skill required to be able to compare correctly is to find relevant evidence. Once a candidate has selected relevant evidence, they should then be able to collate their ideas which will then allow them to produce a valid and relevant comparison.

The same message applies to all comparison questions, those who embark on a generic comparison usually find that they only achieve low marks. Those who focus clearly on the question and include a range of supporting details from across all of the texts, perform best.

The following may help to refine teaching techniques for this question:

- Candidates must read the question carefully and remain on task
- Unlike the synthesis question, when candidates produce a comparison, it is imperative that they make it clear from which text they get their information
- Candidates need to refer to all texts, not just one
- Candidates need to make as many points as possible from each of the texts. Those who simply write down one or two points will only gain a small number of marks.

Writing

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one argumentation and one persuasion) which were loosely linked to the topics studied during the reading section.

For their first writing task, candidates were asked to produce a talk for their classmates:

B1 Increasing litter levels suggest we have lost all pride in our beautiful country. Prepare a talk for your classmates in which you give your opinions on this view. Write your talk.

This task was clearly an argumentation one and candidates across the cohort readily grasped the fact that the talk should focus on the problem of litter. It was heart-warming to note just how many candidates chose to focus on Welsh pride (or the damaging effects that litter can have on the national spirit) throughout their talks. A huge variety of talks were on offer and in this report, I shall aim to comment on format, content, organisation and common issues.

Candidates and teachers are familiar with talks. They are a writing style that was commonly used in the legacy specification and have featured on the current specification. During CPD/webinar sessions, the message has been clear in relation to a talk: work out who the audience will be and then produce a piece of continuous prose/paragraphed writing to appeal to them. The majority produced somewhere ranging between 3-6 paragraphs of writing focusing on the given topic, when writing their talk. Some chose to place speech marks at the beginning and end of their talk. While unnecessary, candidates are not penalised for employing speech marks. A small minority chose to produce scripted writing and this approach was much less successful and should be avoided. Too often, candidates who attempt to use this format end up focusing on stage directions and the delivery of the speech rather than its content. Those who produce a script, especially with two or more characters, often find that they dilute the level of detail in their writing and thus restrict the impact of their work.

The content of a candidate's writing is crucial. When candidates get to the writing section of the examination, they will have spent approximately one hour immersed in a topic and when they then move on to writing, it becomes essential that they not only stay on topic but that their contents are carefully considered. Candidates are not tested on the accuracy of statistics and details but should aim to be as realistic and convincing as possible. Careful planning will enable candidates to select an area for discussion and then move seamlessly to another. Those who do not plan, often find that the contents of their talk end up lacking in direction and detail. A five-point plan, for example, can help candidates to cover a range of different areas and avoid duplication of coverage. When producing argumentation writing, candidates may include some counter-arguments but must ensure that these do not undermine the points that have already been written.

The organisation of writing is often key to its coherence. Organisation does, of course, include obvious indicators such as paragraphs and headings but the direction and content is also closely linked to organisation. Candidates who do not plan their writing often appear to be disorganised and this has a serious impact on the quality of their work. A series of disjointed ideas will be far less successful (usually restricted to Band 2) as opposed to something that flows fluently and links up ideas and concepts. It is certainly worth sharing examples of disjointed writing with candidates to ensure they work to avoid this approach in their own writing.

Over reliance on source materials remains an issue for some. While many candidates included one or two facts from the reading materials (and it is not a prerequisite to do so), and embedded these into their own writing, others were less discreet. Several candidates copied huge chunks of the source materials, often plucking points from one text and then trying to attach them to points from another. Wholesale copying, however, was infrequent and is to be avoided at all costs. It is also very disappointing when a candidate chooses to write out entire sentences from the texts and then copies down incorrect spellings and punctuation. Losing sight of the task is also problematic. Some candidates chose to write about Welsh pride (or a lack thereof) without really touching on the issue of litter. All parts of the task ought to be addressed although it is perfectly acceptable to have an imbalance of information. Finally, the audience for this task was of importance. Candidates ought to be reminded that when they are given a specific audience, they are expected to tailor their tone, style, content and language for that specific audience. Too many candidates produce generic writing that lacks any strength or passion because they simply do not make a clear appeal to their given audience.

B2 Tourism.com is a website that persuades people to visit their country and enjoy its many attractions. You have been asked to write an article for the website persuading families to visit your country during the summer months. Write your article.

This type of task is a familiar one and tied in neatly with Text D. Candidates seemed confident with this style of writing and, although timing proved to be an issue for some, there was no shortage of things to write about. Interestingly, candidates (with the odd exception) seemed more comfortable to move away from the source materials and were comfortable writing about their own experiences and familiar locations.

Planning was also evident across some responses. As mentioned in the previous section, those who plan usually find that they are able to write in more detail and with greater understanding than those who do not consider the content and direction of their writing before they begin. Structure and sequence is also key to success. Many used the planning page not only to plan their writing but to give an indication of sequence. Quite often, candidates who did not plan or consider sequence, produced writing that was disjointed or aimless in direction and undeveloped.

In terms of format, candidates have relative freedom when it comes to an article. Some feel compelled to use columns and headings while others simply produce the text for the article. Either approach is fine, it is the written content that is being assessed. If candidates find that structural features help them to organise their thoughts, then that is perfectly acceptable. In previous series, reference has been made to the inclusion of detailed illustrations, graphs and diagrams. Occasionally candidates included a rough sketch or a box with an instruction ('picture of beach') but these were not included at the expense of written detail. Some candidates were unable to finish their article due to time constraints and it is worth reinforcing the value of careful time management to avoid having to miss out key details.

The articles across the cohort were effusive in their praise for Wales. Candidates wrote at length about Wales' natural beauty and scenery. They included a wealth of details about urban areas and cities citing a huge number of attractions and possible areas for entertainment. It would be impossible to do justice to some of the interesting and informative details included in candidates' work but the diversity on offer and the huge amount of enthusiasm made this a particularly enjoyable task to mark.

As always, technical accuracy remains a concern across all writing tasks. Some candidates struggle to punctuate from the beginning with strangely placed commas in titles. Some manage to write entire paragraphs with only a full stop at the end. Comma splicing continues to be an all too common feature in written work. Inappropriate use of semicolons is a concern and it is advisable that only candidates who are able to use these accurately should be encouraged to do so. Some candidates include a tick list of different types of punctuation on their planning page, which they then try to force unconvincingly into their writing. It is far better for candidates to simply write naturally than to force punctuation where it does not fit. The usual spelling errors continue with many basic homophone errors occurring frequently (our and are, there and their, where and were etc.). It is also disappointing when candidates do not manage to spell words correctly that they have been given in the task.



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