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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2017**

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<b>Unit</b>	<b>Page</b>
Component 1	1
Component 2	5
Component 3	10

**EDUQAS  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**GCSE**

**November 2017**

**COMPONENT 1**

**Section A**

The reading material was taken from a novel by Penelope Lively and it focused on three main characters and the relationships between them. There was limited action in the narrative but there was enough in the characters, and the relationships between them, to provoke an engaged response from most of the candidates.

**Question 0.1**

The structure of this specification requires one question worth five marks to identify explicit ideas and information and the marks were available for a straightforward selection of relevant points. The question asked for a list of what was learned about one of the main characters, Brian Faulkner, and the candidates could simply locate facts or make inferences.

There were enough surface facts available to allow the candidates to gain full marks here. For example, he teamed up with a man he met in a pub to import cheap leather jackets from Spain. He ordered Maureen to move to Luton and promised to find a flat. He did not find a flat and the 'earner' fell through. He made trips to Spain but then moved on to another scheme involving carpet sales. He did not supply his wife with the money for the rent, according to Maureen. However, it was also possible to make some inferences about Brian. For example, the evidence suggested he was an opportunist and not the most reliable or responsible husband and father.

Some of the responses were unselective, imprecise or unfocused and the weaker answers revealed some basic misreading of the text such as Brian teamed up with a man from Spain. However, it was possible to handle this question concisely and efficiently.

**Question 0.2**

This question was only worth five marks and, although it invited some understanding of the effect of the writer's choice of language, the emphasis was also on the evidence used to show the relationship between Lucy and Brian. Given the modest weighting of this question, and the pressure of time in an examination, we have to be realistic about how much range and depth we can reasonably expect and the sensible candidates dealt with this question with minimum fuss. It also helped that the question only focused on a few lines of the text.

The writer informed us that Lucy was only 'acquainted' with her father for a few years so the relationship was brief and, like the link to Luton, it was 'meaningless'. Some candidates did pick up and explain the significance of the use of the word 'acquaintance'. Brian was described as 'amiable', suggesting he was a pleasant, friendly enough character in his way, and the writer pointed out that he took Lucy to the funfair and bought her candyfloss. However, very few candidates understood 'amiable' and consequently very few indeed grasped the subtlety in the relationship. Lucy's memory of him was described as 'appropriately shabby' and, although Brian was a 'jaunty figure' who apparently wanted to make up for his weaknesses and failings, the writer described him as selfish. Brian was presented as well-intentioned in some ways but too feckless and selfish to be a good father and the relationship with Lucy was short-lived and shallow. Quite a few candidates got that the relationship was 'weak' or 'short-lived' but very few saw the complexities.

### Question 0.3

This question was challenging and required the candidates to see how the writer showed the differences between Lucy and her mother, Maureen. Understanding of the two characters was clearly essential to a good response but the better answers kept the focus on the writer and how she used contrasts in the personalities of the two women.

It made sense to begin with the character of Maureen, not least because this gave the answer a point of reference. The writer described Maureen as 'constant' and only changing over the years in 'slow motion' from a harassed and loving figure in her youth to 'good humoured, opinionated and forever a great deal younger than her daughter' as an older woman. The writer then told us directly that Lucy was 'not like her mother'. Lucy was described as not 'easy going' or 'trusting' and the writer used verbs such as 'stared, probed and queried' to show the challenging, questioning, rather edgy nature of Lucy.

The writer used a specific anecdote to illustrate the difference between the characters. When Lucy was four, she 'demanded' to know where the sun goes at night and Maureen was reassuringly comforting and her language, and perhaps her thoughts, were childish. However, the writer showed Lucy's disapproval, describing her 'knotted mouth' as she listened to her mother's explanation. Lucy's temper erupted as she 'burst out' her reply and the anecdote showed her rational, rather literal nature. She had no patience with Maureen's well-intentioned but fanciful version of the real world.

Lucy was described by the writer in various adjectives such as combative, competent and enterprising. She was also said to be curious, hardworking and unwilling to admit defeat but the writer explicitly told us that these qualities did not come from her upbringing with Maureen, who was judged to be 'unable or unwilling' to confront serious questions about the universe. She was described as 'unlikely to turn out to be inspirational'. The writer showed Lucy as assertive, intelligent and questioning whereas Maureen seemed passive, limited and resigned to life.

The writer's language choices were important in showing the differences between Maureen and Lucy and, although she did use examples of the characters in action, there was more 'tell' than 'show' here.

### Question 0.4

This question allowed the candidates to gain credit for giving their impressions of the characters of Brian and Maureen and the relationship between them but it also invited analysis of how the writer created these impressions. The best responses took the two questions together and gave their impressions linked to supporting evidence and analysis of the writer's method.

Most candidates got the impression that Maureen was a sympathetic, pitiable figure and they supported that idea with the evidence that she had two small children, another on the way and a husband who was 'gently easing himself out' of their relationship. It was clear to most candidates that Maureen was blind to what was happening to their relationship, some arguing that she was foolish and others seeing her as cruelly deceived. Brian was away often and was vague and evasive about what he did, claiming that work was 'his problem' and therefore none of her business. Maureen seemed desperate for contact with Brian, crying 'reverse the charges' when he bothered to telephone home. She remained loyal to him, convinced that he is busy with work and even feeling sorry for him as he was 'rushed off his feet, poor dear'. Some argued she lived in hope as contact became less and less frequent but she displayed the postcards he sent. She did not complain and contemplated the postcards 'without comment'. However, some found her exasperating in her naivety and willingness to be a downtrodden victim.

Some got the impression that Maureen was dogged or determined and just got on with life as she was left to cope with solicitors and social security. She was passive in accepting routine humiliation and resigning herself to the situation by accepting 'that's life'. Some noticed that, despite being mistreated by her husband and by various officials, she was not bitter and remained accepting of her situation.

It would have been difficult to argue convincingly that Brian was anything other than devious and selfish. His excuses for his absence really only convinced Maureen and the presents he brought for the children did not impress anyone. The presents and 'nights of love' he gave Maureen seemed empty and selfish and the hugs and waves diminished to phone calls on which he would hang up. Gradually his absences became longer and more significant and contact was reduced to 'infrequent' phone calls and 'erratic' postcards. Brian was not an attractive character and he had few redeeming features.

The relationship seemed one-sided and Maureen's feelings for him were exploited and betrayed. The writer used the interaction of the characters but also captured the tone and thoughts of Maureen, even though it was third-person narrative.

There was a wealth of textual material to use in answering this question and some candidates constructed convincing responses. The weaker answers tended to be thin but very few missed the nature of the relationship between the characters.

### **Question 0.5**

The concept of evaluation is not easy for most candidates and the better answers were organised as a personal response to the character of Maureen with some comment on how successfully she was presented by the writer.

In the final section of the passage, after a lifetime of being disappointed and downtrodden, Maureen was resigned to her situation as a victim of 'absent husbands' and 'arrogant officials'. The passage as a whole had led readers to be angry and indignant on her behalf and the writer successfully encouraged them to feel admiration and sympathy for her. She had been subjected to endless humiliation and betrayal and reacted to it all 'without bitterness'. The writer used Lucy's reaction to her mother's treatment to guide the reader and she was not simply presented as weak and downtrodden, although many candidates did emphasise that aspect of her personality. Lucy understood that Maureen has been 'burdened' by poverty and children but she also understood that her mother had admirable qualities. Maureen was 'resilient', 'resourceful' and 'doggedly protective' and those words were not a description of someone who was just weak and pitiable. Lucy saw that Maureen had behaved like 'any creature of whatever species' and had done what was necessary to survive and to allow her children to survive. Her 'survival tactic' was to 'keep her head down and weather the storms of life', accepting life and grinning and bearing it. Maureen did not question life but she survived by resigning herself to it. Lucy also admitted that she has probably gained her 'sharp wits' from the circumstances of her childhood. Maureen's 'rough time' had had a positive effect on Lucy.

Lucy 'adored' her mother but she was also 'maddened' by her and, as a teenager, she found Maureen's view of life 'exasperating, inconsistent and plain wrong'. Lucy was infuriated by Maureen's naive faith in astrology and her willingness to spend money on it and, when Maureen explains, Lucy just sighed as if she knew it was hopeless to argue with her mother. Maureen emerged as a complex character rather than simply a victim and the better answers saw at least some of that complexity. Most candidates at least had something sensible to say about the character.

## Section B

This section gave the candidates a choice of narrative titles and, as usual, there were opportunities to write from personal experience or to create imaginative fiction. It is encouraging to be able to report that there were very few responses which were not clearly linked to one to the titles. With only a few exceptions, the narratives were relevant in content and genuinely attempting to respond to the chosen title. Inevitably, the responses were variable in quality, and indeed quantity, but relevance was rarely an issue. Some candidates tried to 'bend' a title, sometimes with rather uncomfortable results, but only a few blatantly ignored the options they were given.

### Question 1.1

(a) The Competition.

This title was popular and, unsurprisingly, often focused on a sporting competition or a personal rivalry. There were some rather unconvincing or implausible approaches to this title but overwhelmingly they were coherent. The less successful responses tended to be brief accounts of 'what happened' but some did attempt to explore feelings and emotions and develop the narrative.

(b) Write about an occasion when you were embarrassed by your family.

The responses to this title invariably tackled the idea of embarrassment but some did not read the title carefully and did not see that the family were intended to be the source of embarrassment. It was not a fatal weakness but it did lead to some structural problems. Some responses were not very convincing but the better answers had a feel of authenticity and there was a real opportunity here to develop ideas and reflect on them. Some answers were refreshingly honest and sometimes amusing.

(c) Write a story which ends: ... and Sam felt so proud.

Some candidates had difficulty constructing a narrative which moved seamlessly to its given conclusion and, to be fair, it is not easy to achieve a smooth 'landing'. Some narratives were uncertain in structure and limited in content but a number of them did manage to put together a reasonably coherent and relevant response to the title. Reflecting the age of the entry, there were some moments of pride resulting from successful driving tests.

(d) Write a story which begins: My career on stage was short but it was certainly memorable.

The implication of this title should have been clear and the suggestion that a stage debut ended in a disaster which would not be repeated was picked up by most, though not all, candidates. Some could not resist a theatrical or musical triumph, leading to a successful career covering several decades. However, most were coherent and relevant and this was the option that usually provided the most entertainment for the reader. Some interpreted the notion of 'the stage' rather loosely but this was not a serious issue as most focused quite clearly on a performance of one sort or another.

Technical errors are a persistent cause for concern and many candidates continue to struggle with basic accuracy in written expression. I am sorry to say that problems in spelling, punctuation and sentence construction are still very much in evidence as is ability to control tenses. Candidates would be well-advised to spend five minutes or so proof-reading their narrative writing at the end of the exam to try to improve their technical accuracy.

**EDUQAS  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**GCSE**

**November 2017**

**COMPONENT 2**

**Section A**

The reading material in this examination focused on the subject of whaling. One of the texts was a recent newspaper article reporting that whales continue to be hunted, despite a long-standing international agreement to end commercial whaling, and included an account of the killing of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands. The other text was a first-hand account of a whale hunt in 1850. The texts seemed to engage candidates, who often included their own views on the subject, and the materials gave lots of opportunities to show a range of reading skills.

**Question 1.1**

This first question followed the pattern set in the summer series by asking candidates to identify explicit information in the newspaper article. There were three marks available for the location and selection of the appropriate details. As in the summer series, this was a straightforward 'search and find' task but it was important to read the question carefully. The first part of the question asked for the year that the international agreement to stop commercial whaling came into force. Most candidates quickly identified the year – 1968 – which was noted in the first paragraph of the article.

However, some candidates mistakenly copied out part of the relevant sentence, so that their answers read: "Thirty years on from the 1968 international agreement". It was a simple error but one that could have easily been avoided by a little more careful reading. The second part of the question asked where the Greenpeace activists were operating to stop the work of the Japanese whaling ships. Again, most candidates had little difficulty in noting that this was in the Antarctic Ocean, although some wrote Atlantic Ocean instead and gained no reward. The final part of the question asked how many Sea Shepherd protesters had been arrested when they tried to stop the whale hunt in the Faroe Islands and almost all candidates correctly noted that five protesters had been arrested. This was intended to be a simple reading task that allowed candidates to settle into the text and prepare them for the more demanding question that followed. Most candidates gained the full three marks but it was disappointing to see simple marks lost by what was, in most cases, a lack of care.

**Question 1.2**

This question required candidates to consider how the writer of the newspaper article had tried to persuade the reader that the hunting of whales is cruel and unacceptable, a view that had been expressed in the final sentence of the article. The bullet points included in the question were intended to support candidates in the kinds of explorations of the text they might make. The most useful way of approaching this type of question is to track through the text methodically, selecting textual evidence that supports a view that whale hunting is cruel or unacceptable and where appropriate, commenting on the details, either to clarify exactly what the writer is suggesting or to show how the detail might persuade a reader. For example, the writer begins the article by offering some background details about how the 1968 agreement is being ignored by some countries and making the point

that whale hunting is 'unacceptable' because it is in direct contravention of the international agreement. He gives some clear details about countries that are continuing to hunt whales, refuting the claim that Japan makes that it is involved in only 'scientific' whaling for research purposes, calling it "a fiction which fools no one". His sarcastic tone and comment that "more whale meat ... ends up in Japanese restaurants than in laboratories" confirms his view that the practice is 'unacceptable'. He goes on to talk about the way Norway continues to hunt whales "by simply refusing to sign up" to the international agreement, as further evidence of how unacceptable it is for a country to simply ignore international law. He also talks about how Iceland had killed a large number of endangered fin whales, indicating that they too were operating under a bogus 'scientific research' label.

Other parts of the article particularly focused on what the writer considered to be cruel treatment of the whales, using strong condemnatory language. For example, he calls the current situation "the bloodiest bout of whale slaughter...". The final part of the article deals with a report of the annual killing of pilot whales in the Faroe Islands, where the writer describes in graphic detail exactly how the hunt takes place and the way in which the whales are killed. His language emphasises the brutality of the killings, with phrases such as, "ruthlessly slaughtered" and "gruesome spectacle". The article ends by asking how Denmark, in its acceptance of the whale hunt in the Faroes, can ignore international law and then concludes with the view that "All decent people" should view the hunting of whales as "cruel and unacceptable".

Most candidates could find some evidence that suggested the whale hunts were cruel and could support this with examples of words and phrases from the text and where they tried to range and select from across the whole text, the greater opportunities they created for reward. However, some weaker readers lost the focus of the question and drifted into a personal view about the topic. Others approached the question by embarking on a 'feature-spotting' hunt. This gave them some reward, for example, because of the way the writer used statistics, such as the 250 whales killed in the Faroe Islands, to emphasise the scale of the whale hunts, but the approach often led candidates down blind alleys. Asserting that some alliteration was persuasive was too often a distraction from closely reading the article, while others believed that almost anything could be persuasive. One candidate wrote that he was persuaded by the way "the writer used a lot of different sized sentences" and another by the way "he uses a wide range of punctuation such as dashes, quotation marks, commas and question marks." Whilst there was a wide range of details to comment on, some weaker responses were brief and gave only limited attention to some of the key parts of the article. The best responses were methodical in their tracking of the text and kept a focus on 'cruel' and 'unacceptable' as starting points for their comments. These responses explored the language in the text in detail, commented, with one or two telling examples, on the angry, condemnatory tone of the article and the impact of the way the writer concluded the article.

### **Question 1.3**

This question now focused on the text by Henry Cheever, with three questions on details of the whale hunt in which the writer took part. The questions required some careful reading of the whole passage but presented no real difficulties to candidates who did so. The first question simply asked for the order given by the captain to start the whale hunt. This information came in the second paragraph of the passage: "Stand by and lower boats" and most candidates located this successfully. The second part of the question asked candidates what stopped the whale from escaping the hunters in the small boat. In his account of the whale hunt, Cheever makes it clear that the harpooner plunged the harpoons "which are always secured to one tow-line" into the whale. The whale attempted to escape the hunters but "we were now fastened to the huge whale with the tow-line". Many candidates said that it was the harpoons that prevented the whale from escaping but

more careful readers recognised it was being attached to the tow-line that was the correct answer. The final part of the question asked how far the small boats were away from the main ship when they had killed the whale. This presented few difficulties and most candidates correctly noted that the main ship was fifteen miles away.

#### **Question 1.4**

Having responded to the questions in 1.3, candidates were now asked to consider the Cheever text in much greater detail. They were given a statement: “Cheever gives his readers a clear and dramatic description of what it was like to take part in a whale hunt in the 1850s” and asked how far they agreed with the statement.

As with question 1.2, tracking through the text was the most sensible approach, commenting where appropriate. Some candidates dealt with the passage in three distinct sections: the sighting of the whale; the details of the hunt; and his account of how the whale was taken back to the main ship. They often commented on the way Cheever captures for his readers the details of the first sighting and how the mood of the 'weary' whalers changes to one of excitement and anticipation. They also noted the use of capitals to suggest the shouted excitement announcing the nearby whale and the actual words spoken by the captain to begin the hunt. Some contrasted the description of the whale “travelling leisurely” with what followed, whilst others focused on the description of the whale as “huge creature” or “monster” to show the battle that the whalers were engaged in. Where candidates tracked the text methodically, there were lots of specific details that could be commented on as the attack on the whale took place. Some wrote about the dramatic picture of the harpooner who was near enough “to plunge his two harpoons ... into the monster” while others commented on the description of the whalers’ boat which “spun after him with almost the swiftness of a spinning top”, commenting on the speed of the events. Some candidates wrote about the danger the men were in and how Cheever’s description of the injured whale dramatically captured the scene in detail. Details such as “the enraged whale”, “snapped his horrid jaws together” and “in his senseless fury lashed the sea into foam” were all commented on as examples of the drama of the event. Some tried to explore Cheever’s feelings at the death of the whale, saying how this too, added to the clarity of the description. In the final section of the passage, Cheever explains that for the whalers the task is not completed until the carcass is back with the main ship and how this is itself a difficult and dangerous task. Here, candidates commented that Cheever’s description, giving details of rowing “under a fierce sun” that would “blister the hands and strain the muscles” showed clearly how tough a job the whalers had. Most candidates found some details to comment on but some were brief and limited and gave little or no attention to the key incident in the passage. Others got side-tracked into giving their views about whale hunting but where candidates kept a focus on the question and were prepared to consider which details or part of the passage were relevant to the question, they were able to gain good marks.

#### **Question 1.5**

This question, asking for the ability to select and synthesise materials from the two texts, invited candidates to explain in their own words how whales were hunted in the 1850s and are now hunted in the Faroe Islands. This was a question where the selection of appropriate detail was key but careful readers showed it was possible to gain full marks with just a few sentences. Lots of candidates recognised that in Cheever’s text, once a whale was sighted, small boats were sent to attack it from the main ship. Some noted the ship was often far from home and most saw that the attack was made with harpoons attached to a tow-line on the boat. The injured whale carried the small boat along until it died, at which point it was towed back by the whalers to the main ship. Good candidates were able to select appropriate details and then went on to explain how the Faroe Islands hunt took place. Many saw the difference between Cheever’s hunt for a single whale and

the Faroes hunt in which many whales were driven towards the beach by people in small boats. Once this happened the Faroe Islanders dragged the whales up on to the beach where they were killed. Weaker readers sometimes lost sight of the question and struggled to gain any marks. Others offered just a little detail or wrote about just one of the texts, limiting reward, but for those who were focused on the question, this was a good opportunity to gain full marks.

### **Question 1.6**

It has often been the case that comparison of texts presents a particular challenge to some candidates. In this question, candidates were asked to compare Cheever's attitude to the hunting of whales in the 1850s with that of the writer reporting on the Faroe Islands whale hunt, and then explore how the writers get across their attitudes to their readers.

Most candidates recognised the difference in attitudes shown by the two writers, even if it was put as simply as one candidate expressed it: "Cheever is for whale hunts and the writer of the article is against them". Some candidates tried to develop their responses more fully by saying, for example, that Cheever is excited by the hunt, that he admires the bravery and skill of the whalers and celebrates the killing of the whale, that he terms "a monster". Some candidates did explore how Cheever celebrates the killing but also shows some respect for the whale when he writes about it being "painful" to see the animal dying. Most candidates tackled this question by dealing with each text separately and in looking at the Cheever text, saw that he made his attitude clear to readers by focusing on specific details of the whalers' bravery, for example, "the brave captain" who "boldly" harpooned the whale. He also writes about how the death of the whale was greeted: "We gave three hearty cheers", which further shows he viewed the hunt as having a good outcome.

Few candidates were confused by the attitude of the writer of the article on the Faroe Islands whale hunt. They saw he was appalled by what he saw as the 'massacre' of the whales and some saw the way he cited the flouting of international law as a reason to oppose the hunt. In dealing with the article, most moved quickly into the way the writer's attitude is made clear, selecting appropriate details of the description of the killings and the strong language used. Some merely gathered a list of relevant quotes with limited comment while others gained greater reward by commenting on the impact of specific words and phrases.

### **Section B**

In Section B of the examination, candidates were invited to tackle two writing tasks, each of between 300-400 words. Most candidates seemed to complete both tasks, and although some responses were brief and lacked range and development, there were few that lacked a focus on the intended audience.

### **Question 2.1**

For this task, candidates were asked to write a lively article for a school or college magazine, with the heading: A Teenager's Guide to Managing Parents.

The task offered the opportunity to show how, in one candidate's words, it was possible to "wrap your parents around your little finger", although many responses took the view that 'managing' parents meant doing all the things that needed doing or that irritated parents. Most of the responses that took this approach tended to suggest that keeping one's room tidy and responding immediately to requests for household chores to be done were the ways to maintain family harmony. Many were earnest in their exhortation to always consider parents' feelings, to be more considerate and to avoid conflict at all costs. More ambitious attempts did try to explain to readers how parents could be 'trained' to always agree to giving

late-night lifts home, or they gave tips about how readers might avoid cleaning duties or looking after younger siblings. These were often more lively, although it was perfectly possible to gain a good mark for content and organisation by adopting a more serious approach.

Good responses often opened with a recognition that 'managing parents' was a problem that faced all teenagers, and a confession that the writer him/herself had been the victim of unfair nagging or unreasonable requests from parents, until they had perfected the art of managing their parents to the point where this knowledge could be imparted in the guidance that would now follow. These responses then often explored four or five scenarios faced by teenagers with advice about how to deal with them, the best of these developing the situations and solutions in some detail. Most responses then concluded with some general advice or that the guidance could be guaranteed to work in any situation. In some cases, responses were simply too brief to gain good reward, with situations discussed in little detail. Often these responses were well below the indicated 300-400 words.

## **Question 2.2**

The second task was a talk given to fellow candidates about how to make the most of the summer holidays. Candidates were asked to write what they would say when they gave this talk. Tackling this successfully relied on candidates having a range of suggestions to make, and on being able to develop the information or advice. Most candidates were able to show at least an awareness of the audience they were writing for, and many began their 'talk' by acknowledging that many candidates found it difficult to fill the long holidays with worthwhile activities. Often these introductions captured the spirit of the task well and most were comfortable in managing the appropriate tone and direct address to fellow candidates.

To build on this, candidates then needed to have a range of appropriate suggestions to offer and weaker candidates often struggled to develop these. In some cases, there were suggestions that became little more than a list; suggestions about going to the cinema, or going swimming or visiting a park or simply meeting up with friends could all be developed into more detailed responses by more able candidates but where they stayed at the level of a simple list, the response was weak and usually brief.

Some suggestions naturally allowed candidates to explore ideas in greater depth and often this was developed into quite detailed paragraphs. For example, some candidates advocated voluntary work, giving an anecdote about their personal experience of this, and then moved on to discuss the benefits to be gained during and beyond the time spent volunteering. Others wrote about schemes that candidates could participate in for part of their holiday, such as the National Citizen Service programme, which gave opportunities to discuss a range of activities that could be undertaken. Some candidates wrote about taking holiday jobs and teachers would be delighted to know that in many cases the first suggestion was that homework given to cover the holiday period should be tackled immediately. The best responses gave a sensible range of suggestions, each of which was dealt with in some detail, and often the work had a clear structure that concluded with a paragraph that urged the audience not to waste their time and to make good use of the holiday so that it could be looked back on as a time that had been spent productively.

In both tasks, it was evident that many candidates were rewarded in a higher band for the content and organisation of their work than they were for technical accuracy. Basic spelling and punctuation errors and weaknesses in sentence construction were a feature of many responses and became a limiting factor for too many candidates.

# EDUQAS ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

November 2017

### COMPONENT 3

#### General overview

As most candidates resitting carried forward their original Spoken Language grade from the summer, the number of samples monitored in this November series was relatively small. In the main, centres submitted work from one or two candidates who wanted to improve their grades although some candidates over the age of 16, largely from FE or Sixth Form colleges, were entering for the first time.

On the whole, candidates' presentations were assessed fairly and accurately according to agreed standards. As the candidates had the benefit of a little more maturity, they generally spoke quite confidently on topics in which they were genuinely interested. Monitors enjoyed some interesting and lively presentations which reinforced the value of Spoken Language for candidates of all abilities.

However, the following points were raised by monitors in relation to **task setting** and **assessment issues**:

- **Some candidates might have achieved a higher grade if their tasks had been slightly adjusted to include a specific purpose and/or audience**; with a clearly defined outcome it would have been easier to shape their material and achieve key criteria for Merit and Distinction. For example, one candidate spoke with enthusiasm on a popular television programme, employing some impressive vocabulary. Unfortunately, her talk was descriptive and not *organised in a way to engage the audience* even though her responses to some challenging questions indicated potential for sophisticated ideas. The task could have been 'tweaked' to include a specified audience and purpose, perhaps to explain to an older audience why the programme has such a cult following among her peer group. This would have given the candidate more opportunity *to fulfil the purpose of her talk* and to meet the criteria for Distinction grade. **Detailed advice on task setting is available on the Eduqas GCSE English Language webpage under [ALL COURSE MATERIALS](#).**
- As mentioned in the Principal Monitor's report for the summer series, **those candidates who simply read aloud from written speeches were unlikely to meet Distinction criteria**, especially the need to demonstrate an *effective range of strategies to engage the audience*. This rather stilted approach was perhaps still more troublesome in those candidates who read from PowerPoint slides, often turning to face the screen rather than their audience. Candidates wishing to use PowerPoint as an aide in their presentations would be best advised to limit the material printed to key words, or visual images, rather than reading text from slides.

- **Quite a lot of candidates spoke straightforwardly about events in their lives, such as moving to this country from abroad or dealing with health-related issues.** These topics often worked well for less confident candidates, including those who were learning English as a second language, to meet the relevant criteria for a Pass grade.
- **In some cases, the candidates' presentations comprised responses to questions put by the teachers, using an interview format,** as in the exemplar presentations given by JOSH and PHOEBE in the inter-board standardising materials. This gave the support of a built-in framework or scaffold, provided by the teacher's questions. However, as one of the criteria for a Distinction requires candidates to *organise and structure the presentation using an effective range of strategies to engage the audience*, this format does not always benefit those aiming at the highest grade.
- As expected, **the quality of the questions posed was often a deciding factor in determining the final grade awarded** and monitors saw evidence of some sensitive and probing questions which elicited thoughtful responses in turn. Perhaps as teachers were dealing with smaller numbers, often only a single candidate, they were able to focus more intently on the individual presentations and ask challenging questions which allowed candidates to develop perceptive responses where appropriate.
- Unfortunately, in a small number of cases, **the candidates did not respond to any questions in the recording**, although monitors felt that in some instances, this might have been because the Q and A section had been cut off or lost. **It is essential centres keep in mind the criterion relating to AO8 which requires candidates to respond to questions or feedback even at Pass grade. This means that any candidates who do not respond to questions should be graded as Not Classified.** It is therefore imperative that candidates are given this opportunity and that centres ensure clear evidence of the Q and A is included in the recording to support the grade awarded.
- **Some centres still seemed unsure of how to apply the competency model for assessment and appeared to be using a 'best-fit' approach,** awarding higher grades to candidates who had met **some** rather than **all** the relevant criteria. As a result, some centres had assessed their candidates too generously, as not all the criteria, especially for Distinction, had been met. In a small number of cases, monitors felt that candidates had been assessed too severely, perhaps by teachers who were not fully confident of the standards. Some candidates tackling challenging topics had been awarded Pass grade when they had actually met all the criteria for Merit grade.
- There is clear guidance on how to apply the assessment criteria on the open website and all teachers assessing candidates must first watch and discuss the exemplar presentations to become fully familiar with the agreed standards. These can be located, along with full commentaries explaining how the criteria have been applied, on the secure website under RESOURCES.

## Administration of the sample

- **A significant number of centres did not meet the deadline in early November for submitting their sample to their designated monitors** and had to be contacted directly by WJEC/EDUQAS. Quite a lot of centres also had to be reminded to make clear that resit candidates were carrying forward their Spoken Language grades. This slowed the process considerably and hopefully all centres entering candidates for the November series next year will comply with entry requirements for Spoken Language by the given deadlines. **Many teachers find that a useful way to keep informed and up-to-date with deadlines is to subscribe to the free GCSE English Language bulletins via the open website.**
- **Some candidates' presentations were difficult to access because there was a lot of ambient noise or the recording device used simply did not work well enough.** There were also a small number of problems with accessing the presentations, as in the summer series, when centres had not used readily available media platforms or ensured that the recordings were complete and had not been corrupted.
- USBs generally often proved easier to use than DVDs although **centres need to ensure that devices are carefully packed**; some envelopes arrived ripped and without the USB stick which meant that centres had to resubmit the candidates' work. **All centres are advised to keep electronic copies** of the work sent to monitors in case of loss or damage in transit.
- **Monitors greatly appreciated those centres who presented the sample presentations in a separate file for each candidate and, where relevant, grouped into separate folders for each grade.** The most efficient centres ensured the material was clearly labelled with the centre's name and number and encouraged candidates to state their individual names and numbers at the start of their presentations.
- A checklist for centres to use when preparing their monitoring sample will be available for centres on the open website.

## Summary of advice

- Centres must ensure that candidates aiming at Merit and Distinction grades are given appropriate tasks to allow them to meet all the relevant criteria.
- Those candidates aiming at the highest grades need guidance on shaping their material and honing presentation skills to *engage the audience*.
- Candidates must respond to questions to achieve a classified grade and those aiming at higher grades rely on some element of challenge in the questions posed.
- All teachers must be fully confident with the competency assessment and how to apply it when assessing their candidates' work
- All teachers assessing candidates must first watch, and where possible discuss with colleagues, the standardising presentations before awarding grades for their own students' presentations.
- Centres should aim to meet deadlines for submission of candidates' work and ensure that the sample presentations are easily accessible and clearly labelled.



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