

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/11
Writing Paper 11

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for your **speech**, to introduce **both points of view** and create a **sense of interest** in the debate.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Responses are often weaker where candidates have lost control of grammar in attempting to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation. One error which occurred with some regularity was a lack of capital letters for proper nouns and to start sentences.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not attempt **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or less linguistically accurate, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, consisted of text for effective speeches, and successfully created a sense of interest in time travel. Weaker responses described

one or two scenarios from the past or the future, and did not address their audience or make it clear that this was the opening speech for a debate. Candidates should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the task; the guidance of *no more than 400 words* means candidates are being guided to provide a purposeful, succinct response.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly or entirely on content and therefore provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the **1(a)** response.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (magazine article, review or description), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were quite repetitive and lacked variety and balance, some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the content of the course, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion, and some **Question 4** responses were mainly narrative rather than descriptive.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You are going to take part in a debate at school about whether it would be more interesting to be able to travel back to the past, or forward to the future. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a short speech on the topic.

- (a) Write the text for your speech, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, introduce both points of view and create a sense of interest in the debate.**

The exact wording of the question, asking candidates to *open the debate*, signified that some form of opening address was needed. While most candidates wrote an introduction which included a greeting to their audience of peers and a brief outline of the purpose of their speech, others did not acknowledge the audience. Stronger responses demonstrated a clear opening, establishing the purpose of the debate. Levels of formality varied, with most opting for the more informal 'Hello' and 'Welcome everyone,' thereby addressing the audience, while some candidates incorporated some use of less formal language such as 'y'all'

Most candidates were able to offer ideas about why one should travel forward or back in time, and some chose to conclude by supporting one side of the argument. Reasons to visit the past were varied, perhaps reflecting some of the candidates' interests, and included: witnessing historic events such as WWII, the Great Depression, and the Boston Tea Party; watching record breaking sporting events; discovering more about dinosaurs, such as whether they had feathers. Many suggested seeing old friends or relatives who had died, while others mentioned how you could now 'ace' your assignments. A few candidates mentioned stopping tragedies occurring, such as 9/11. Reasons to travel to the future were not quite so diverse, but included: to see if the world does still exist or whether humanity has been taken over by AI/robots/aliens; to meet their future self to see if they were successful; to marvel at new technology (such as 'the iPhone 150').

Stronger responses recognised both the physical and moral implications of changing the past or knowing the future, and many included mentions of the 'butterfly effect.' They provided further context for the debate before moving onto some of the arguments and reasons for travelling back to the past or forward to the future. Stronger responses provided some specific examples to engage the audience; if travelling to the past, these included being able to see the Beatles live in concert, or to witness the 'election of Lincoln' and the 'glory of the Roman Empire', while examples for travelling to the future included seeing 'improvements in health care' and the impact of AI intelligence/technological advancements, including 'flying cars.' Concluding comments were

apparent on stronger responses, with closing sentences such as 'Sit tight and listen,' and 'Quite a hard choice, is not it?'

Weaker responses were often limited in scope and repetitive. Many weaker speeches were short, often under 200 words, and therefore lacked in development of ideas. Some said what the debate motion was, introduced the speakers from the two sides and then wrote no more, without creating a sense of interest. Some did not address their role in starting a debate, launching straight into their own thoughts on the topic, while others spent a lot of time introducing the debate, describing the school and welcoming the audience rather than engaging with the topic. Many weaker responses would have been improved with greater attention to structure, often having been written without any paragraph breaks.

Weaker responses were also often hampered by grammatical errors, for example in sentence construction, missing words and spelling, as in this example: 'Another side of the argument is why should we travel back to the past if we allready what happen in it why should you keep on fustating your self with the past, if we can travel foward and see the bright future, which is a bright as the sun.'

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

For most candidates, performance on this question was generally the weakest for the paper. One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Most candidates who produced stronger responses approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure, going through the content of the speech and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and attempted to analyse how the writer's stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, for example: 'I decided to personify the future in a simile. The future is like a caring mother that we can not delaying knowing, given the chance [(sic)]. This simile appeals to the ethos of my audience, who can relate with the image of a nurturing mother.'

Quite a lot of candidates demonstrated the ability to select particular words and phrases they had used and to begin some analysis of their choices, but few got beyond a limited level of analysis, sometimes including inaccurate terminology, as in this extract: 'The writer makes it clear that the speech is in first person point of view by using first person pronouns such as "us", "we", "our" and "you". The writer uses these words to make it clear that the person giving the speech is speaking to his audience. The reader is able to interpret from the writer the sense of inclusion letting the audience feel appreciated and united together.'

Weaker responses sometimes showed an ability to identify some basic language and structural features, but less so in terms of analysis. Some candidates attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'I used rhetorical questions to keep the audience engaged. They helped the readers think as they listened.' They often wrote very short or general answers without adequate analysis of effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. There were many examples of candidates paraphrasing the text of their speeches or focusing solely on structure, with little or nothing on language. Some candidates listed linguistic features without providing supporting evidence. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Magazine article

In class, you have been discussing whether all museums should be free. You have decided to write an article on the topic, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates presented a balanced argument on the advantages and disadvantages of charging a fee to enter museums. Some candidates seemed to have knowledge of the intricacies of running a museum and used that to inform their writing. Many articles had a title and some included subheadings. Most candidates wrote in the form of an article, with some appreciation of the need for a formal or semi-formal register. Candidates explored a range of arguments on either side, some more successful than others, some with a deep sense of passion. Some candidates employed headings such as: 'Is History breaking the bank?'

In stronger responses, arguments were developed clearly, offering quite convincing reasons on both sides of the discussion. These candidates often structured their articles by providing the pros and cons before offering a clear point of view that effectively wrapped up their discussions. Many stronger responses included subheadings as a way of directing the reader's interest and included solutions which added depth, as opposed to a string of issues without resolution. Others provided clear, focused topic sentences for each paragraph. Interesting ideas included that as we pay for cinemas we should pay for museums, and that museums are educational and we claim education is for free. Some provided mature arguments as to the lack of feasibility of the impact of free entry on budgets; equally, some candidates argued ethically for the idea of free museums and how this would positively impact on educational experiences.

Weaker responses tended to be limited in scope or overly focused on one issue, such as one which spent too long discussing the cost of plumbing issues and the consequent need to increase ticket prices. Some candidates stated an opinion but limited their discussion to a few simple ideas, for example that, if museums were free, overcrowding would inevitably lead to damage and breakages of valuable artefacts. Frequent errors, poor organisation and weak expression impeded many responses.

Question 3 – Review

Last summer, you did a two-week course to learn a range of water sports. You decide to write a review of the course, which will be published on an activity holiday website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The strongest responses to this question were those which combined descriptive elements and details with some evaluation of the facilities, staff and prices, as well as utilising the review form effectively. Some of these responses addressed the problem of having the advantage of top-quality facilities and instruction but also considered the high costs involved. Many weaker responses to this question were short, sometimes fewer than 400 words.

Stronger responses showed clear understanding of the features of a review, adopting a suitable, credible voice and register that facilitated some sophisticated expression and, sometimes, some humorous touches appropriate to an activity holiday website. They offered evaluative comments on the venue, the standard of accommodation, the course costs and administration, the instructors, the equipment and the food provided. They wrote clear reviews of the pros and cons of the course, highlighting what was offered and whether they were fit for purpose. Headings and subheadings were often used, providing a clear structure for the review. Paragraphing was clear, with each paragraph often beginning with a topic sentence to guide the reader through the review. For example, one candidate opened their second paragraph like this: 'Though I am oozing with positive things to say regarding this course, let me begin with the less exciting details.' Stronger reviews ended clearly with a summative paragraph and a clear conclusion, such as in this example: 'The staff, equipment, structure and overall quality of the course is well worth any amount of money, but it makes it that much better that this two-week immersive experience is only \$250. Please sign up if you enjoy the water. I guarantee it will change your life for the better!'

Many weaker responses merely recounted the writer's experiences on the course, such as writing about the weather and the friends they made, and many wrote a concluding paragraph that did or did not recommend the course. Some weaker responses tended to list the activities rather than review them, for example: 'We could surfboard, wakeboard, swim, water polo, waterskiing – all these things were offered on the course.' Other weaker responses described rather than reviewed, for example: 'The waves were lapping at the boat and I felt the sun on my face', or digressed into irrelevant factors like personality clashes among those attending. Some weaker responses often fixated on some minor detail, such as the provision of snacks on the course, rather than concentrating on the substantial issues that a genuine review would want to cover for its readers, such as value for money, quality of customer service and availability of equipment. Many weaker responses lacked paragraphs and other organisational devices and had frequent errors of various kinds, including lack of control of sentence structure. For example, one candidate wrote, 'The first day it was a very welcoming day everyone got along well including the staff which you do not see very often. We got to know

each other first where we were from, how old we were, and what made us want to join. Also with a fun fact of us, of course, that can never miss out.'

Question 4 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece called *The Square*, about a town square at sunrise. In your writing, focus on colour, light and movement to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates used a narrative frame in their responses to this question. The wording of the question was quite specific with the focus being *a town square at sunrise*. Many candidates overlooked *sunrise*, and this oversight produced some less focused and engaging pieces of writing.

In stronger responses, candidates had taken a wide variety of approaches to the task. Examples included a character seated in the square at sunrise, noting gradual changes in light with an increase in sound and movement. This proved to be a successful approach, engaging the reader, allowing for detail, with conscious choices of vocabulary. Conscious crafting of language, utilising suitable and well-chosen lexis, was a strength in some good descriptions. One candidate described a fountain 'washing the night away in a wave of warmth and light.' To capture movement, candidates included early morning shop keepers and market holders setting up their stalls for the day. Detailed descriptions were an element of the majority of stronger responses. For example, a simple but clearly imagined detail was described by one candidate: 'There were kids of all ages; their words filled the previously empty air, but still talking about nothing.' Other details, such as 'the dragon flies dart around the square, their wings rapidly fluttering with a sense of haste' demonstrated clear focus on the imagined scene. Sustaining the present tense successfully sometimes enabled higher-level attainment, for example: 'The sun stretches out rays that look like thin, long, luminous arms swaying around you. Since you're under the willow, its leaves encapsulate you. It feels private; the colours and light exist only for you.'

Some weaker responses demonstrated a struggle to organise the description and many candidates used minor or incomplete sentences. Quite a large number had trouble with verb tenses, often switching back and forth between present and past, while others wrote a narrative piece which contained a limited amount of description of colour, light and movement. Narration was common amongst weaker responses, with dialogue between shopkeepers and customers. In many such responses, descriptive content tended to be limited as narrative details dominated. Some weaker responses mechanically listed features of light, sound and movement rather than incorporating them into the piece of writing, such as in this example: 'The shops were bright and clourful [(sic)]. No noise or movement as they were closed'. Some wrote about the journey to the town square for much of their answer so that the directly relevant material only began late in the response. A large number focused mostly on colour, often of the sunrise, buildings or flowers. On occasion this was effective, but often resulted in lists of colours and tones that became rather stilted to read. Some weaker responses simply included lots of adjectives, such as 'the pale-skinned, handsome boy stood by tall, bushy, green trees.' Some responses were not restricted to the sunrise and described how the square changed throughout the day. Like the other **Section B** responses, many weaker responses lacked paragraphs and contained frequent errors of various kinds, including lack of control of sentence structure. For example, one candidate wrote, 'The people began to gather and see what a mess was left. Their assumptions becoming reality. The only color left was that in the sky. The most beautiful sunrise the town had ever seen.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Writing Paper 12

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for your **first blog entry**, to create a **sense of enthusiasm** and to **encourage others to take part**.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Responses are often weaker where candidates have lost control of grammar in attempting to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation. One error which occurred with some regularity was a lack of capital letters for proper nouns and to start sentences.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not attempt **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or less linguistically accurate, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, consisting of blog entries which were both engaging and encouraging; they were clearly the first entry of the blog and enticed the reader to return to the blog for more details in later posts. Weaker responses addressed the issue but

tended to describe the walks without creating enthusiasm or addressing their audience. Candidates should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the task; the guidance of *no more than 400 words* means candidates are being guided to provide a purposeful, succinct response.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly or entirely on content and therefore provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the **1(a)** response.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (review, letter or description), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some reviews in **Question 2** were simple accounts of the boat trip, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion. Some responses to **Question 3** lost focus on the formality required of the letter and became repetitive, with the same points made several times rather than offering a selection of relevant points, while some **Question 4** responses were mainly narrative rather than descriptive.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You are taking part in a fitness challenge which involves walking 10 000 steps every day. You have decided to write a blog about the experience.

- (a) Write the text for your first blog entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of enthusiasm for the challenge and encourage others to take part too.**

Most responses were written in an appropriate blog format, with a suitable tone and address to the audience. Some candidates chose to include blog conventions such as dates, links and hashtags. There was generally good awareness of typical features of a blog, although the informal style did prompt some overly informal use of language, with some incomplete sentences and a lack of accurate sentence demarcation. A great many candidates described both the physical and mental difficulties they experienced doing the challenge and they gave ideas about how they managed the challenge, such as breaking it up into short walks throughout the day, walking to places instead of driving, or starting with fewer steps and building up. Some described how they stayed motivated, such as walking to the coffee shop or walking with friends and then having brunch, or because they were in a competition for some prize money. In some instances, candidates exceeded the 400-word limit due to overlong introductions with an unnecessary amount of detail regarding the rules of the challenge. However, some well written responses were too brief, as positive advice and positive language were missing.

Stronger responses engaged the audience of the blog from the outset, for example: 'Hello everyone! I'm back and I'm feeling better than ever! It is currently the third day of my 10,000 steps challenge.' They sometimes took on a persona which gave them a different viewpoint on the subject, for example an adult or parent outlining ways in which extra paces might be incorporated into a busy working schedule. They used a degree of anecdotal material to reflect the blogger's commitment to the challenge and the degree of change in the level of fitness. This change was sometimes successfully reflected through a contrast in language. For example, one candidate wrote of the 'gruesome, exasperating' challenge which then became 'a breeze', a 'walk in the park' and a 'delight'. An enthusiastic tone to encourage others was evident in these more focused responses, such as in this concluding paragraph: 'So, what are you waiting for? I reckon all of you, my followers, are capable of beating this 60-day challenge. I'll be looking forward to seeing the metal that you're made of!' This enthusiasm was often seen in simple sentences such as 'You can do this!' and 'Join me, friends, for this gruelling challenge!' Field specific lexis related to sport trickled through the writing with references to 'playlists' 'step counters' and 'fit bits' along with puns and catchy phrases, for example, 'Glow and grow', and 'Fitness Frenzy' were used as headings.

One candidate added a poetic touch with, ‘nothing is more refreshing than a morning jog under the glistening morning sky before a day of revitalising exercise.’

Weaker responses often lacked paragraphs and other organisational devices. Some tended to lack focus on the part of the rubric which asked candidates to encourage others to take part in the challenge, giving too much attention to relaying the woes of the challenge and body image. Some blogs lacked enthusiasm for the challenge and did not encourage others to take part, with only a token, ‘I do highly encourage people to try it’ appearing in many responses. Content was sometimes unconvincing or undeveloped, with some unrealistic claims about the type of athleticism required to walk 10,000 steps, and the number of miles or kilometres the distance covered. Many weaker responses took too long to get to the focus of the question, the challenge itself, creating lengthy expositions leading up to their decision; this resulted in a lack of concision and focus. Weaker responses were also often hampered by grammatical errors, for example in punctuation, sentence construction and spelling, as in this example: ‘At first It seemed unrealistic to me like “how can one walk 10000 steps a day”? Ubelievable! but believ me I choose to take up the challenge, I went and bought the most comfortable shoes and clothes for walking.’

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their blog entry and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Most candidates who produced stronger responses approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the blog’s content and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features in their responses, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how the writer’s stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, using terminology to enhance their analysis, for example: ‘Moreover, my blog also utilises a metalinguistic approach with words such as “bingeable” and “funk”, as a form of sociolect that is likely to appeal to a younger, fitter audience. This is often accompanied by different lexical fields to create tonal shifts. For example, at the start of the entry, a negative lexical field of struggle and pain is evident, with words such as “cramps”, “ache”, “crushed” and the adverb “begrudgingly”.’ Other stronger responses considered linguistic choice, purpose and audience in an integrated way. For example, one candidate wrote: ‘My blog begins by addressing the audience as “fitness fanatics” and “couch potatoes” – contrasting metaphors which immediately grab the attention of the reader. The phrase “buckle up comrades” creates excitement because usually people are told to buckle their belts before doing something fun, such as riding a rollercoaster. The noun “comrades” connotes an inclusive unity.’

Weaker responses sometimes demonstrated an ability to identify some basic language and structural features but showed more difficulty with analysis. Frequently, candidates included more obvious points, such as, ‘I wrote in paragraphs: to break up the text, so the reader knew to expect a new topic.’ Some candidates listed linguistic features without providing supporting evidence: ‘I used hyperboles, metaphors and verbs’, ‘I used yours faithfully at the end of the email’, ‘I did a good job’, ‘I didnt [(sic)] write too much as the reader would get bored’. Often, there was little attempt to explain how a technique’s use furthered the writer’s purpose, other than making vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader. Such candidates often wrote very short answers or very general answers, listing lots of features but without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. There were also many examples of candidates paraphrasing their speeches or focusing solely on structure with little or nothing on language. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

Last weekend, you went on a boat trip in your local area, which was organised by a new tourism company. You decide to write a review of the trip, which will be published on a travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The review form was generally understood and evaluative lexis used to an extent by most candidates. The strongest responses to this question were those which combined descriptive elements and details with some evaluation of the facilities, staff and prices, as well as utilising the review form effectively. Some of these responses addressed the problem of having the advantage of top-quality facilities and knowledgeable tour guides while also having the high costs involved.

Stronger responses established form, subject and purpose from the outset. For example, one candidate engaged the audience in the opening paragraph through imagery and word play: 'Delta Tours' boat trips are exactly what you would expect from a scruffy, tropical seaport: old, rusty nautical gear, stolen signposts and dilapidated wooden decking underfoot. When my tour advisor suggested we try out a new tourism company advertising, "the gnarliest boat tours on the Atlantic," I should have expected something fishy. But no amount of briefing could have prepared me for this floating fiasco.'

Stronger responses showed clear understanding of the features of a review, adopting a suitable, credible voice and register for a travel website. They offered evaluative comments on the venue, the standard of the boat, the costs, the guides, the scenery and the food provided. They wrote clear reviews of the pros and cons of the boat trip, highlighting what was offered and whether they were fit for purpose. Headings and subheadings were often used, sometimes starting with a heading incorporating the name of the company, for example, 'Eyes of wonder' and 'Wet and wild!' Many reviews felt authentic and sounded genuinely enthusiastic, such as in this example: 'I did not want this marvellous river trip to end. The flamboyant fish, towering trees and massive mountains framing the scenic view provided a five-star experience.'

Paragraphing in stronger responses was clear, with each paragraph often beginning with a topic sentence to guide the reader through the review. For example, one candidate opened their fourth paragraph like this: 'Although the staff were exceptional, the snacks provided were of a mediocre standard.' Such stronger responses ended clearly with a summative paragraph and a clear conclusion, such as in this example: 'I would never recommend this tour to anyone. I experienced nothing but disappointment, mismanagement and incompetence all round. Mauritian madness indeed!'

Many weaker responses recounted the details of the boat trip in detail but included few elements of a review. Some weaker responses read like a straight narrative account of the trip, rather than a review of an experience. Weaker responses sometimes provided details of the journey to the harbour, being greeted by the captain on arrival and the accommodation and food provided, but needed more focus on the boat trip itself. Other candidates merely described their experiences on the boat trip, such as writing about the weather and the friends they made, and wrote a brief concluding paragraph that did or did not recommend the trip. Some weaker responses fixated on some very minor detail, such as the provision of snacks on the trip, rather than concentrating on the substantial issues that a genuine review would want to cover for its readers, such as value for money, quality of customer service and the places visited. Many weaker responses lacked paragraphs and other organisational devices, and contained frequent errors of various kinds, including lack of control of sentence structure. For example, one candidate wrote, 'Last weekend I decided to go on a boat trip in the local area which organised by a new tourism company and I have decided to write a review about this trip to show the pros and cons of this trip but this would be based on my experience but it may also be different to yours.'

Question 3 – Letter

You recently read a newspaper article which said that young people should get jobs after leaving school, rather than go to university. You decide to write a letter to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Successful letters were well organised, got straight to the point and used discourse markers effectively. A large majority of responses were appropriately formal and were generally in agreement with the newspaper article. Many candidates chose to include fictitious statistics or quotes from experts to prove their points; generally these were quite sensible and believable.

Most stronger responses acknowledged the article in their opening address and many candidates created quotations from the imagined article in order to develop their opinions, for example: 'Your article insists that getting a temporary job before going to university increases the chances of getting a permanent job after graduation. However, research has shown that in fact the opposite is true.' Those who referenced the article in detail gave various reasons for agreeing with the statement in the prompt, while other candidates justified the contrasting viewpoint, some using sophisticated expression, as demonstrated in this extract, achieved using carefully chosen discourse markers, sentence structure, punctuation, lexis, register and tone: 'Although I agree that perhaps not everyone should attend university, it is simply not beneficial to encourage the entire generation to simply skip the process. Additionally, I believe that this message instils into the youth a false narrative that university is useless or that all career paths are available without it, which is not the case.'

Stronger responses demonstrated an ability to produce reasonable, balanced arguments on the issues raised in the article. In addition, rather than making bold assertions, some candidates presented their ideas effectively using moderators such as 'many', 'may' 'could'. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Moreover, young people could have the freedom to experiment with different careers without having to commit to one field. Many universities do not give young people the opportunity to discover their real passions. Getting a job may enable a young person to learn more about that field and if it is as good fit for them.'

Weaker responses often demonstrated a minimal attempt at text organisation, with inaccurate sentence demarcation errors further affecting coherence. Such candidates seemed to struggle with conveying many relevant ideas and some seemed to go off track very easily, resulting in a rant to the editor, often in an inappropriate tone and register for an amateur writer addressing a professional insider. Several writers seemed to break out of their role with unexpected bluntness, such as in these two examples: 'I hope you consider this information as well as receive it well' and, 'I hope you have a great day further and I hope hear back from you [(sic)]. Kind regards.' Many responses contained frequent errors of various kinds, including lack of control of sentence structure. For example, one candidate wrote, 'Many people wish for these jobs, its evident when they say, "i want to be a doctor" or "i want to be an engineer" these careers and many others require higher education for many years.'

Question 4 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece about a factory in the middle of a working day. In your writing, focus on the sound, light and movement in the factory to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates used a narrative frame in their responses to this question. The wording of the question was quite specific, with the focus being the 'middle of the working day', which was overlooked by some candidates who described a full working day shift, or early morning in a silent factory. These descriptions did contain relevant content but lacked precision and depth of detail. Specificity helped engage the audience in a number of responses, where candidates identified a particular type of factory and production, for example a shoe factory, a chocolate factory or a car factory.

Stronger responses took a wide variety of approaches to the task. Examples included taking a factory tour and a speaker's first day working at the factory, so the shock of the new was very much determining their perspective. Such specific approaches gave those answers an integrity and cohesion that some of the others lacked. Some of the most successful used an extended metaphor, such as a symphony or a beehive, to develop their response. This sometimes proved to be a successful approach, engaging the reader and allowing for detail, with conscious choices of vocabulary. Conscious crafting of language, utilising suitable and well-chosen lexis was a strength in many good descriptions. One candidate described the workers thus: 'Like bees in a hive, they buzz from table to table and machine to machine. Loud snippets of conversation fill the factory, before they scatter to their original positions to resume their intensive labour.'

Detailed descriptions were an element of the majority of stronger responses. For example, one candidate described the factory workers: 'The workers, pale and lifeless, begin their robotic movements as the machines sputter and whirr. Everything except for the items on the conveyors is filthy. The machines grind and gnash their gears, locking up due to a buildup of oil, dust and metal fragments.' Other details, such as the concentration of workers in a car factory, were equally effective: 'Their orange rectangular toolboxes and tools are littered everywhere around them. Some of the workers are bent over an open hood, their faces contorted in contemplation over where the next piece to their mechanical puzzle will go. The more artistic mechanics sport masks and aprons with paint spray guns in hand, moving steadily and smoothly.'

Some weaker responses showed a struggle with text organisation and many candidates used minor or incomplete sentences. Quite a large number had trouble with verb tenses, often switching back and forth

between present and past, while others wrote a narrative piece which contained a limited amount of description of sound, light and movement. Narration was common in weaker responses, with some including a lot of dialogue between factory workers; in such responses, descriptive content tended to be limited as narrative details dominated. Some candidates mechanically listed features of sound, light and movement rather than incorporate them into the piece of writing, such as in this example: 'The benches were grey and boring. It was noisy and people were moving everywhere.'

Some candidates who produced weaker responses wrote about the journey to the factory for much of their answer, so that the directly relevant material only began later in the response. A large number focused mostly on colour, often of the workers or of the products being made in the factory. On occasion this was effective, but often resulted in lists of colours and tones that became rather stilted to read. Some weaker responses simply added lots of adjectives, such as 'the old, pale, tired man worked at a grey, dull, crowded bench'. Some responses were not restricted to the middle of the working day but described how the factory changed throughout the day. As in the other **Section B** responses, many weaker responses lacked paragraphs and contained frequent errors of various kinds, including spelling and lack of control of sentence structure. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Staring out into the overveiw of the factory; The enless sea of machinary and workers. Everything becomes clear and in perspective. We are all the same working for someone else weather you are working for a boss or you are the boss we all slowly kill ouselves to survive.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13
Writing Paper 13

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates do understand the key requirements of each question, it may be helpful to underline key words within the question which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for your **email to the editor**, giving **reasons to support your opinion**.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is an essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Responses are often weaker where candidates have lost control of grammar in attempting to write in long, complex sentences. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation. One error which occurred with some regularity was a lack of capital letters for proper nouns and to start sentences.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and a few candidates did not attempt **Question 1(b)**. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or less linguistically accurate, possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging emails, stating clear opinions on the given topic. Weaker responses did not adhere to appropriate form and did not refer to the newspaper article. Candidates should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the task; the

guidance of *no more than 400 words* means candidates are being guided to provide a purposeful, succinct response.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on linguistic and stylistic choices, with the relationship between these features being explained and explored successfully. They used relevant terminology consistently and confidently, using language precisely and appropriately. Weaker responses focused mostly or entirely on content and therefore provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the **1(a)** response.

Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task (review, story or essay), a clear focus on the question and included appropriate stylistic conventions, as well as relevant content.

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some reviews in **Question 2** were simple descriptions of the website's contents, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion, some responses to **Question 3** did not create a sense of drama or suspense, and some **Question 4** responses lost focus on the formality required of the essay and became repetitive, with the same points made several times rather than offering a selection of relevant points.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

You recently read a newspaper article which said that people spend far too much time and money shopping these days. You decide to write an email to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion.

- (a) Write the text for the email, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, give reasons to support your opinion.**

Successful emails were well organised, got straight to the point and used discourse markers effectively. A large majority of responses were appropriately formal and were generally in agreement with the newspaper article. Many candidates chose to include fictitious statistics or quotes from experts to prove their points; generally these were quite sensible and credible.

Stronger responses engaged the audience through a range of effectively illustrated arguments in support of a particular view on shopping. Some of the issues raised included e-shopping/e-commerce, the role of Influencers and celebrity endorsement, social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok and Instagram, and the pervasiveness of 'shopping culture', capitalism and consumerism. Candidates sometimes took on a persona which gave them a different viewpoint on the subject, for example a parent defending three teenage offspring or a low wage worker. Most stronger responses acknowledged the article in the opening address and many candidates created quotations from the imagined article in order to develop their opinions, for example: 'Your article stated, "Young people shop like moths to a flame." I disagree strongly and current research backs me up.' Those who referenced the imagined article in detail gave various reasons for their opinions, mostly agreeing with the statement in the prompt, such as in this candidate's thoughtful consideration of the impact of clothes shopping on a global scale: 'So how does the world maintain this global demand for clothing? Fast fashion. Companies like "Shein" completely take advantage of workers in other countries that have weaker laws to protect citizens and create sweatshops to produce masses of horrible quality items and clothing, while paying workers merely cents per garment. This results in huge profits for CEOs while workers suffer and consumers continue to purchase items to blend in with the latest trend.'

Weaker responses listed what had been stated in the article and tended to be brief. For example, one candidate highlighted that 'the total time spent shopping in a year was a good thing to write'. Another wrote a very limited response, stating several simple points such as, 'I do not think spending time and money on shopping are bad, instead I think it's really good and enjoying.' Weaker responses often demonstrated a minimal attempt at text organisation, with no paragraphing and inaccurate sentence demarcation further affecting coherence. Such candidates seemed to struggle with conveying many relevant ideas and some went off track very easily, resulting in a rant to the editor, often in an inappropriate tone and register for an amateur writer addressing a professional insider. Many weaker responses contained frequent errors of various

kinds, including lack of control of sentence structure; for example, one candidate wrote: 'I could say that most people shopping are just for themselves. No matters it's to upgrade ourselves, or just like the moment of spending money, it's all acceptable.'

(b) Write a reflective commentary on your text, explaining how your linguistic choices contribute to fulfilling the task set.

One approach that worked well for many candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their email and explaining the effect on the audience. However, some responses were limited in detail and failed to provide evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Most candidates who produced stronger responses approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the email's content and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how the writer's stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, using terminology to enhance the analysis, for example: 'Low frequency lexis is used in conjunction with the formal register to solidify the formality of the piece and come across as well informed and educated. Words like "valiant", "alienate", "blunder", "intrinsic" and "inclusivity" are examples of this.' Other stronger responses considered linguistic choice, purpose and audience in an integrated way. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Throughout the email, the writer establishes an extended metaphor for capitalism comparing it to an insect. The writer uses vocabulary such as "blood sucking mosquito". The writer also uses vocabulary such as "greedy", "weird", "leeches", "chains" to create a semantic field of oppression surrounding the concept of capitalism to show how it is influencing consumers' mental health and wasting valuable time and money.'

Weaker responses sometimes demonstrated an ability to identify some basic language and structural features, but showed more difficulty with analysis. Frequently, candidates included more obvious points, such as: 'I wrote in paragraphs: to break up the text, so the reader knew to expect a new topic.' Some candidates merely listed linguistic features without supporting evidence: 'I used many similes, adjectives and verbs', 'I used yours faithfully at the end of the email', 'I used a lot of first person of speech because it is an opinion'. Often, there was little attempt to explain how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose, other than making vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader. Such candidates often wrote very short answers or very general answers, listing lots of features but without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. There were also many examples of candidates paraphrasing their speeches or focusing solely on structure with little or nothing on language. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

A news website aimed at teenagers has recently been set up, and you have been looking at it. You decide to write a review of the news website, which you will post on your blog. Write between 600 and 900 words.

A good level of imagination was used to respond to this question. The review form was understood and sustained evaluation, with appropriate lexis, was produced by most candidates. Most responses were clear and effective, with the best responses showing very effective use of a wide range of technical language. The strongest responses to this question were those which combined descriptive elements and details, demonstrating clear understanding of how news should be presented to a target audience of teenagers.

Stronger responses established form, subject and purpose from the outset. These responses showed clear understanding of the features of a review, adopting a suitable, credible voice and demonstrated a very strong sense of audience and skilful use of the blog form to write a review of a news website. Several candidates structured the blog entry using very effective subheadings. For example, one candidate used sub-headings which included 'Accessibility and Navigation' and 'Appearance and Appeal for Teenagers'. The candidate began the latter paragraph effectively: 'The website, I have to admit was a bit much. While it was sleek and

the content itself was perfect, the colours were far too bright. Come on. Neon pink and yellow? This is not 2001.' Such stronger responses were well structured with an appropriate degree of informality for a blog. New websites were given titles such as 'Teen Talk Today', 'Got news.com', and 'News for YOUth'. The casual style, frequent use of personal and second-person pronouns, which were typically evident in stronger responses, made for quite credible responses.

Paragraphing in stronger responses was clear, with each paragraph often beginning with a topic sentence to guide the reader through the review. For example, one candidate opened two of their paragraphs with these topic sentences: 'I found the content itself to be rather frivolous and trivial' and, 'Putting aside my gripes with content, I have to admit that this site is very well designed.' Such stronger responses ended clearly with a summative paragraph and a clear conclusion, such as in this example: 'I believe this site works well for entertainment, but is probably not the best and most constructive place to spend your energy. One thing I can say for sure is you do not want to be getting your politics from there!'

Many weaker responses focused almost entirely on design aspects of the website. A few candidates misread the question and reviewed a 'new' website aimed at teenagers, with no focus on 'news'. Other weaker responses recounted the details of the contents of different sections of the website, usually in some detail, but included few elements of a review, while some were organised into several brief sections with only simplistic review comments. Some weaker responses lacked paragraphs and other organisational devices and had frequent errors of various kinds, including spelling and punctuation. For example, one candidate wrote, 'Overall the webize is quite blance and structured, I would ask for a search system personally but consider its in starting stage, it's far from bad.'

Question 3 – Story

Write a story called *Fake* about a person who is not who they claim to be. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

There were some highly creative responses and impressive structuring and use of complementary narrative devices. Creating a convincing character was often key to a story's success, particularly if a narrative viewpoint was then adopted. For example, there were stories of a deposed emperor who then posed as a merchant before being found out and executed, and of a person being replaced by their reflection, which began intriguingly: 'One day my reflection climbed out of my bathroom mirror.' Some candidates chose unusual and engaging settings for their narratives, along with more unusual cases of fake identity. One was set in a prison camp and one in an Antarctic science lab, where scientists were researching strange geothermal happenings. There were some unexpected endings to entertain the reader and some narratives reminiscent of the Alfred Hitchcock genre of horror films. The short story form was not always strictly adhered to, with some candidates opting for cliff hanger endings. However, there were quite a lot of stories which seemed to suggest a belief that the darker the story is, the better it is. There were several twisted stories with soulless fake characters who killed and maimed many victims.

Stronger responses often engaged the reader from the first sentences, as seen in these two openings: 'The room is dark, only a small part of the mirror lit by the tiny candle place beside it. Day 568 without a home, without a true identity, without a true name'; 'I worked the usual 9 to 5. Big Office. Downtown, Cubicle and all. Everything was great in the city. That is, until he arrived.' More engaging and successful responses focused on feelings of confusion and in some cases panic as the narrator tried to make sense of the person who was not who he claimed to be, as in this response where the narrator found himself alone in the classroom with a mysterious student: 'As he locked eyes with me, I found I was unable to move. I sat there for what felt like hours, the world narrowing to only him and the thumping of my heart.' Strong responses tended to spend time establishing setting and character. Setting was often ominous and dark; more effective responses achieved this through imagery, such as, 'The door made a horrible death wheeze as it creaked open.' Additionally, showing the character's feelings and reactions, such as in 'A familiar stab shoots through my stomach as I feel my hands get clammy', rather than merely stating them is what separated the stronger responses from the rest.

Some of the weakest responses had plots which were too complex and hard to follow. Other responses lacked coherence and structure when trying to achieve the necessary withholding of information needed to create suspense. Other stories were very simple cases of mistaken identity which did not achieve a sense of drama or suspense. In addition, some weaker responses failed to use paragraphs as tools to effectively create the required atmosphere of drama and suspense. Some weaker responses were incomplete, lacking a convincing ending; some responses followed tropes such as waking up from a dream. Errors which hampered the effectiveness of many responses tended to be centred in grammatical frameworks, with a significant number of candidates making tense and sentence demarcation errors throughout their responses.

Another common error was the sudden switching of narrative voice without intention; this frequently took the form of a third-person to first-person switch as the candidate became more involved in their story. Punctuation of direct speech was also often weak.

Question 4 – Essay

Your class has just had a debate on whether health or happiness is more important in life. Your teacher has now asked you to write an essay on the topic. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The majority of candidates who answered this question discussed the issue in a balanced way, offering arguments to support each side of the debate. Most candidates were confident with the discursive essay form, paragraphed their essays clearly and used a formal or semi-formal register.

Stronger essays were clearly planned and written with logically arranged paragraphs and discourse markers. The question prompted some interesting discussion points which were successfully conveyed by some candidates who argued that health and happiness are 'intertwined'. Stronger responses clearly stated a viewpoint in the opening, and then proceeded to develop this point. Such essays had a clear and focused introduction with an established point of view, for example: 'Both health and happiness are related.' One candidate simply argued that 'Keeping healthy makes you happy – keeping a smile makes you healthier.' Such effective openings with clear statements lead to discussions of ways to stay healthy which in turn brings happiness, or as one candidate preferred to call it, 'a state of gradual contentment which arises more as you get older'. Stronger responses argued that happiness is a 'state of being' and often 'momentary'.

Weaker responses tended to reveal a struggle to write 600 words of relevant content. Some essays contained too many statistics, with detailed and convoluted definitions, and others were purely based on autobiographical material about personal struggles for happiness. Some candidates who produced weaker responses had attempted to cover too much ground, separating physical health from mental health and happiness from unhappiness, with numerous examples given in each case. The result was confusion and contradiction. Other weaker responses were not composed in the correct form and the essay nature of the task was substituted for something more resembling an article, with a headline and subheadings. The occasional less confident candidate lost the thread of argument and counterargument to contradict themselves until a final conclusion suddenly emerged in the last paragraph. Responses with no evidence of a plan tended to be weaker.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond 'feature spotting' in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as 'Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.'

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that 'x' was an asyndeton and 'y' was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer's choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer's choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as 'why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play', would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner's interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were too few responses to either question to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was the second most popular text in the drama section, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** There were only a few essays seen on this question. Weaker responses retold more or less relevant parts of the play, often focusing on the Duke and his 'various plans to deceive everybody else in the play', as one learner suggested. His disguise, the bed trick and the head swap were often discussed, with better answers exploring 'the moral ambiguities these stratagems created', as one learner described it. More competent answers explored different types of deception, with some good points made about 'self-deception, which is the key to understanding Angelo, Isabella and the Duke'. More successful answers supported such arguments with specific reference to the text, which enabled some learners to consider Shakespeare's methods in detail. Angelo's soliloquies were well analysed in some very good answers, for example, noting 'how Shakespeare signals his corruption through his misuse of religious symbolism and legal cant', as one expressed it. Other good essays saw religion as a tool for deception in the play generally, 'starting with the Duke dressed as a friar, and leading to Angelo's false assumption of a moral high-ground and Isabella's self-virtue which fails to protect Mariana,' as one essay argued. Where such arguments were supported by analysis and some awareness of relevant contexts, the answers did very well.
- (b)** Successful responses to this question always had a good knowledge of the appropriate context, in terms of the wider text and in terms of the characterisation of Isabella and Claudio at this point in the play. Weaker answers retold the story of their relationship, with some very weak answers unaware that Isabella was Claudio's sister and assuming she was his pregnant fiancée, severely limiting the relevance of any commentary offered. Better answers at this level were aware of the situation, including Isabella's moral dilemma and often had sufficient understanding to see how the characters develop in this exchange. More competent answers noted how similar they are. For example, how 'both of them change their opinions in a short space of time', with others noting that 'Claudio's willingness to sacrifice her virginity is not that far removed from her willingness to use Mariana's in the same way.' Good answers considered the methods closely, with many noting Claudio's use of 'graphic and horrifying imagery to reveal his fear of dying', and Isabella's 'use of religious language to give her refusal a moral high ground'. Other good answers analysed the effects of her 'almost immediately lapsing into the language of sexual deviancy, even about her own father', linking it to her similar responses to Angelo's immoral proposal. Very good answers were able to explore details tellingly, with some learners remembering, for example, that 'the disguised Duke is secretly listening to their conversation', which, for some learners, leads to his later proposal 'now that he is sure of her virtue', as one answer argued. Others saw how this exchange might have influenced Isabella's attitude to Mariana later, 'a sort of moral slipperiness that unites the siblings' as one put it, while others noted that this was 'Claudio's last meaningful appearance until his surprise (for Isabella) rebirth in the final scene', and explored his characterisation in that light. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and the wider text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, such as attitudes to nuns and to premarital sex, the answers often did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was not a popular choice of text, with only a few essays on the **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** There were only a few answers seen to this question, with weaker answers unsure of the context and only able to offer a general paraphrase of the passage, with some broad references to the wider text. Better answers had clear knowledge of why Chume is so enraged and why Jero is disappointed about him. The relationship between Jero and the Member was also discussed, with most answers noting how this revealed Jero's power and 'his ability to make the most of situations' to the audience. Good answers explored the dramatic qualities of the passage and the play, with some learners alive to the dramatic action, the comedy and the use of stage effects such as the mound and the lighting. Other good responses analysed how Soyinka 'sets the responses of the member and Chume to Jero against each other so the audience is acutely aware of Jero's hypocrisy and dishonesty', as one suggested. Only a few responses analysed Soyinka's use of dramatic language and movement, such as how 'the Member's awe-struck language, designed to inflate our opinion of Jero, is set against him fleeing the violent Chume in undignified haste', as one candidate suggested. Other good answers noted how Jero informs the audience of what is going to happen after the end of the play 'in a sort of choric function', as candidate said. Good answers were also comfortable in linking the events here to the wider text, in order to assess their significance to the audience. However only rarely were detailed knowledge and understanding of the play linked to knowledge of appropriate contexts, which was a limiting factor for some responses.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text on the paper with over three quarters of the entry choosing it. The majority of learners opted for the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** This was a popular question, with nearly every answer able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers focused on the relationships between Brick and Skipper and Maggie, often showing straightforward knowledge in retelling their stories. Most learners considered that 'Williams shows the audience that without honesty neither friendships nor marriages can survive', as one suggested. Mendacity was a common discussion point, enabling better responses to develop arguments encompassing Brick and Big Daddy, for example. There was some blurring of friendship into a more general consideration of relationships in some weak essays, but for the most part learners showed some understanding of how 'Williams reveals that all successful relationships have to start as friendships and where they do not, such as with Gooper and Brick, there never can be any relationship', as one expressed it. Better answers developed such arguments with detailed and appropriate reference to the text, with many noting how the 'different versions of Brick's friendship with Skipper are a key factor in the development of the play's action', whilst others linked the antipathy between Gooper and Brick to 'a typical 1950s response to possible homosexuality shown by the narrowminded bigots of the McCarthy era', as one essay argued. Good answers noted the language used in these different versions, with Brick's 'outraged use of the anti-gay tropes – "something dirty" – was at odds with the sympathetic almost delicacy of Big Daddy's response', as one learner noted. This was extended into considering how Brick's language and actions differed when confronted by Maggie ('violent and provocative') and with Big Daddy ('outraged at first and then defensive'). Such analysis, where supported by detailed reference to the text and with appropriate awareness of contexts, often lifted the responses into the higher levels of assessment.
- (b)** This was the most popular question on the paper. Successful answers at every level had at least a sound knowledge of the textual context of the passage and were aware of the preceding conversation about Skipper, leading to Brick's decision to tell Big Daddy the truth about the cancer. This knowledge enabled learners to explore the significance of this passage with better understanding. Weaker answers tended to retell the history of the relationship and what happens to Big Daddy with only basic reference to the given passage. Better answers at this level were aware of Big Daddy's 'joy at his positive diagnosis', and how that 'freed him up to finally take notice of the

state his favourite son had gotten into', as one noted. Some weaker responses were confused about the stage directions, referring to 'readers' and unaware of their actual role in shaping a dramatic performance. Other more competent responses noticed, for example, how in the exchange, 'Williams shows us Big Daddy trying to reassert control over his son, by tenderness, physical threats and emotional pressure', as one essay suggested. Other competent answers noticed his concern for his son, 'perhaps his one redeeming feature', according to one, 'given his attitudes to Big Mama and Gooper'. Good answers developed such ideas by exploring Williams's use of dramatic methods, for example the stage directions, the setting and stage props such as the crutch and the drinks. Where this developed into analysis of the effects of these methods, as well as the use of language, the answers did very well, with some noting for example how 'the use of dashes to indicate interruptions and pauses and even emotions enables Williams to orchestrate the audience's response'. Very good answers were aware of how this exchange develops, seeing the 'hints of the later brutality from Brick in some of his language here: 'painful', 'nowhere' and even 'mechanical', as one noted. Answers at this level often supported points with appropriate contextual references, with Williams's own relationship with his father and contemporary attitudes to parenting and father/son relationships featuring frequently.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a popular text in **Section B** with over half of the entry choosing it, quite evenly split across the two options.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task, showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. Success in the lower levels of assessment was determined by how well the selections were shaped to the specific demands of the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the entire plot of the poem, with only occasional references to 'desire and its effects'. Better answers at this level were able to shape their narrative summaries so that often there was at least an implicit contrast made between the various characters. More competent responses tended to consider each character in the poem in turn, discussing the particular desires of that character and, in the more successful essays, what the effects of those desires were. Sir Gawain was a popular focus of attention, with many learners noting how 'his desires change throughout the poem, from seeking honour and glory to a more mundane desire to stay alive by the end', as one essay expressed it. Other sound essays argued for different kinds of desire. For example 'the host's wife on the surface desires Sir Gawain as a lover, but in reality we learn that she really desires to test his loyalty and courtesy as a knight', whereas for other learners 'the Lord Bertilak's desire to impress Sir Gawain is clear from his pride in his hunting spoils, even though he also desires, as the Green Knight, to overcome him in battle'. Good answers supported such arguments with close reference to the text and this led naturally to some analysis of Armitage's methods. Essays at this level often had perceptive readings of the effects of, for example, 'the wife's use of seductive language and actions to hint at her desires, all the more suggestive because the object of her desire, Sir Gawain, is naked in bed and trying to maintain his virtue with his careful choice of knightly words', as one expressed it. Such analytical comments were often supported by precise references to the text and covered a range of methods, from language and imagery to exploring the dramatic qualities of actions and setting. Very good answers developed their interpretations by exploring the effects of desire in terms of characterisation and tone, but also the effects of Armitage's methods in terms of the reader's response. Where such essays also included reference to appropriate contexts, most notably the chivalric code and attitudes to honour, they invariably did very well.
- (b) Nearly every learner was able to respond relevantly to Armitage's presentation of the Green Knight in the given passage and the majority of responses were aware of the context of the passage: 'Arthur's court enjoying a typical medieval Christmas feast', as one put it. Weaker answers however tended to retell the story of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, often in knowledgeable detail, but with too little focus on the details of the passage. Better answers at this level did discuss the Green Knight, often using details from the passage to offer opinions about his role and characterisation more generally in the text. Nearly every answer at least considered the implications of his colour, variously a symbol for magic, nature, violence and supernatural powers. Better answers explored Armitage's use of 'detailed description, from the sprig of holly to the forest-green buttons', as one learner suggested. Other sound answers discussed how Armitage creates 'a dramatic impression

of the Green Knight's size and his impact on the feasting courtiers', as one said, with some candidates seeing him as terrifying, intimidating or, for some, slightly comic, 'almost like a monster out of a modern Marvel film', as one learner noted. Good answers developed such interpretations by exploring more of the detail – Armitage's use of language and alliteration were often well analysed – and at this level there was a good understanding of 'the suspense and anticipation created in the courtiers and the readers of the poem', as one learner suggested. Very good answers analysed the effects of Armitage's choices well, noting, for example, how the confidence of the Green Knight is reflected in his language and demeanour, 'but is intriguing and threatening at the same time'. Answers at this level explored the style closely, including the effects of the 'bob and wheel', and the use of first person in both narration and through the Green Knight himself to 'create an immediacy of effect in the reader and to connect readers directly to the events of the poem', as one noted. Where such arguments evaluated the significance of this passage by precise reference to the wider text and were supported by appropriate contextual references, the essays did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** There were only a very few essays seen on this question. Most learners were able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task, with popular choices being *My Last Duchess*, *The Laboratory* and *Porphyria's Lover*. Weaker answers paraphrased the events in their chosen poems, with success at this level reflecting how well the discussion was shaped to the task. More competent answers chose contrasting poems to discuss, thereby embedding at least an implicit awareness of the range of ways in which Browning used and portrayed violence. The way the monk in *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* reveals his unfounded anger in minor acts of violence, for example, was well contrasted with the jealous rage of the lover in *Porphyria's Lover* and her subsequent murder. Learners noted how a variety of human emotions might lead to different kinds of violence. 'Love, hatred, envy, jealousy and even religious zeal could all lead to somebody's death', as one noted. Others discussed how Browning 'often focuses on the warped and unhinged mentality of those who are violent, often against innocent victims such as Brother Lawrence, Porphyria or the Duchess', as one good essay argued. Such arguments were often supported by detailed reference to the poems and with good awareness of Browning's methods, especially his use of 'the dramatic monologue and dark, sinister language which gives the reader clear insights into violent passions that lead to the acts of violence'. Other good essays considered his use of verse form, imagery and rhyme, often choosing appropriately contrasting poems to illustrate their arguments effectively. Very good answers developed such insights with appropriate quotations and a perceptive grasp of the effects of Browning's choices, with some contrasting a Victorian reader's possible responses to those of a more modern reader. This enabled some learners to integrate contextual references seamlessly into their interpretations, notably on Victorian attitudes to women and sex. Such essays invariably did very well.
- (b)** Weaker answers on this poem tended to be insecure in basic knowledge of the poem's meaning, often confusing the friend and the speaker's actual situation with the woman. Better answers at this level were able to offer a mostly accurate paraphrase, with some shaping of the commentary to the specifics of the task. Many were aware of the 'arrogance of the speaker and his derogatory attitude to the woman and his friend', as one learner suggested. Other responses concentrated more on the 'differing attitudes the men had to the woman', with the 'friend's passion contrasting the speaker's diffidence,' as one argued. Her role in causing the split between the friends was well discussed and for some 'her silence was symbolic of Victorian attitudes to women generally', as one essay argued, with others noting that 'she was adored as well as exploited by the men in her life'. Competent answers explored Browning's use of narrative perspectives, from 'the speaker evidently talking to someone not connected, the friend's anguish and the woman's silence all leading to the rather teasing reference to Browning himself, as a dramatist,' as one summarised it. Good answers also considered the language carefully, the speaker's contrasting of the eagle and the wren for example and the comparison of the woman to a pear ripe for plucking. This again led good responses into considering appropriate contexts, such as changing attitudes to women and to friendship. Some good essays did consider Browning's use of dramatic monologue here with some perceptive analysis of its effects. Few essays however looked closely at Browning's use of verse form or the more immediate poetic methods such as rhythm and rhyme, which limited the overall effectiveness of the analyses offered.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with more or less all of the learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) This was a minority choice, with some very weak answers responding as to an unseen poem, with only a very general grasp of the poem's meaning and concerns. Better answers at this level were able to offer a basic paraphrase of the poem, with some understanding of Clarke's concerns: nature, 'her delight in simple things such as cooking apples', Wales and life in the countryside. More competent answers noticed her use of the first person, 'which gives the reader an insight into the speaker's emotions', as one learner suggested. Other sound answers noted her use of 'sensual language and imagery as though she is talking about a lover', whereas others discussed the 'more sinister undertones of violence in her language'. Good answers developed such insights into considering the effects of her choices, such as the use of free verse, the structure of the contrasting stanzas, her use of time and for nearly all learners at this level her 'total immersion into the traditions of the countryside, through her references to the "original sin" and the symbol of apples with worms at their heart', as one essay expressed it. Very good answers analysed the literary features in depth, for example, 'the contrasting use of first and third person pronouns to create a sort of conflict in the reader's mind', as one suggested. Where such interpretations were supported by appropriate quotation and some awareness of relevant contexts the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) This was a popular question with approximately a quarter of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers, generally aware of the dialogue as a structuring device, were however often confused with some of Herbert's symbolism, 'dust and sin' and the 'unworthy guest', for example. At this level, not many identified the religious meaning of the poem, suggesting a less than assured understanding of the poem in general. More competent answers were able to follow the dialogue as 'Love tries different ways to comfort the speaker' and were often aware of the significance of some of the symbolism: 'Sit and eat' was recognised as 'symbolic of God's love, perhaps symbolising communion itself', as one suggested. Good answers were able to explore some of Herbert's methods beyond the religious symbolism. His use of dialogue, first person narrative and rhyme was well analysed, with some very good answers able to comment on poetic form: 'the poem is perfectly symmetrical, perhaps mirroring God's inherent omnipotence and perfection', as one learner suggested. Very good answers were also able to explore the 'overarching metaphor of the speaker being a guest and Love being the host', as one summarised it, 'appropriately symbolising the relationship between the doubting believer and God, as one where the believer is always made welcome'. There were few successful attempts to contextualise the poem, with only a very few learners aware of Herbert's biography and this for other learners was a limitation on the depth and pertinence of their interpretations.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was a popular text in **Section C**, with the majority of learners choosing option **(a)**, the discursive essay question.

- (a)** Over half of the entry opted for this question. Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material with which to address the task and Robbie and Cecilia's story featured, sometimes exclusively, in every answer. Weaker answers showed at least basic knowledge and understanding of the key events in their narrative, with most learners able to offer relevant opinions, often supported by detailed knowledge of the novel's content, but with less focus on methods. Briony's role in perpetrating the injustice was also well discussed, with better answers also able to explore her characterisation and in some cases her development through the different sections of the book. For some learners, 'injustice was part of Briony's imagination, which was the cause of much "deep suffering" in the novel' as one learner suggested. More competent answers focused on her role as 'the narrator and the creator of the story', with some seeing her in a more sympathetic light: 'ironically as it might sound, Briony is a victim of injustice herself', as one learner suggested. Good answers were able to focus more closely on McEwan's methods. His use of different narrators, his use of time and his language choices were popular discussion points at this level and, where the arguments were supported by relevant reference to the text, the answers did well.
- (b)** This was very much a minority choice of question. Weaker answers often struggled to give a precise context, seemingly unaware of Briony's situation at this point in the novel. Better answers linked the extract back to the original attempt to stage the play and were able to trace Briony's development into the 'less certain, but still self-centred old woman she has become', as one suggested. More competent answers looked closely at some of McEwan's methods – the use of the first person led some answers into promising discussions around narrative perspectives and the 'problem throughout the novel of the unreliable narrator', as one learner noted. Some essays did get carried away in spotting the connections between past and present, often showing good knowledge of the text, but at the expense of sufficient focus on the given passage. Some good work on the extract contextualised that 'the disease was taking away the only thing Briony has – her memory', as a preface to the presentation of her character here. This was developed in good essays by a close examination of McEwan's choice of language and how Briony's 'diseased brain is unable to keep focus for very long, shifting from "glottal "t" to Spanish blood to Shakespeare', as one essay noted. Other good answers saw how 'her memory of the performance shows how her mind changes the reality of things', as one suggested, and some essays at this level were able to explore how this was significant to the novel's meaning and effects. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to both passage and wider text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did well.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either question.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with very few answers seen and nearly all on option **(b)**.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the story and some understanding of the concerns. Weaker answers tended to summarise the whole story before considering the significance of this passage. Better answers at this level were able to explore Paxton's character and had at least some awareness of the effects of the first-person narrator 'in shaping how the

reader responds to Paxton's revelations', as one suggested. More competent answers noted that 'he is in a rush to tell his story' and 'reveals his secret in an odd way', according to one. Better answers looked at how James created these effects: 'he leaves clues to help the reader understand Paxton', as one essay expressed it. Language, tone and the use of the two listeners were often considered by good responses with some awareness of the effects of James's choices in 'creating a mood of excitement and suspense', though for other learners the effects were 'more sinister and threatening than exciting'. Where learners could analyse specific moments in the passage to support such interpretations the answers often did well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with only a few responses seen with nearly all of the learners choosing the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Most essays were aware of the relationship between Huck and Tom, though some were confused by Tom's allusions to haunting. Weaker answers tended to retell some of Huck's story, with limited focus on the passage and only a general awareness of the significance of this passage. At this level there was also little understanding of Huck's current situation and what his problems were. More competent answers did have sufficient knowledge and understanding to explore how 'Twain created mystery and uses Tom as a way of reminding the reader of Huck's dilemma', as one suggested. However very few of the answers considered Twain's methods with any confidence. There was some reference to first person narratives and 'the use of dialect to create characterisation', as one noted, but Twain's language, use of comedy and dialogue were rarely mentioned even in the more successful responses.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond 'feature spotting' in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as 'Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.'

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that 'x' was an asyndeton and 'y' was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer's choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer's choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as 'why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play', would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner's interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON and WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were only few responses to this text with about an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly all of the few answers seen were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold De Flores's story in the play with little or no reference to the given quotation. Better answers at this level were able to shape their ideas more relevantly. More competent answers did have opinions and arguments on his characterisation. De Flores was viewed 'to be both pretentious and inward looking, only thinking of his own needs whilst being condescending in relation to the needs of others', as one suggested. Other responses considered him in terms of his relationship with Beatrice, with most learners agreeing that 'they are equally self-absorbed and self-centred', with 'by the end a sexual obsession that excludes other considerations such as family loyalty', as one learner argued. Better answers looked at methods, with most learners noting that, 'His constant references to himself and the constant use of 'I' and "myself" represent his selfish nature.' For some, his 'love or obsession with Beatrice made him certainly equal to Piracquo and Alsemero', was a mitigating factor, though he was also viewed as 'self-pitying and unable to accept the consequences of his own actions' by others. Where these arguments were supported by close reference to the text the answers did well.
- (b) This was the slightly less popular choice. Learners who knew the play well and could place the passage accurately in its context were at an advantage. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationship generally, often with only brief reference to the given passage. Slightly better answers were able to consider the significance of this exchange, 'the first time that they meet in secret', as the starting point for the 'deception and intrigue that leads to rape and murder', as one explained it. Sound answers saw their contrasting attitudes to Piracquo – 'Alsemero immediately thinking of the honourable challenge and duel, Beatrice of subterfuge and murder', as one suggested. However, some learners also noted that 'Beatrice has a much sharper understanding of the consequences of Alsemero's challenge', and her 'female wisdom sees the dangers in Alsemero's approach'. Good essays explored how the dramatists presented their attraction to each other, 'using religious language and imagery and dramatic action in the kiss', as one essay stated. Alsemero's 'honesty' of approach and her eventual deceit of him as well as Piracquo were analysed well at this level, 'her mention of "fouler visage" immediately bringing De Flores to her mind and setting her on her self-destructive course', as one essay argued. Her attitudes to Alsemero – 'too good to risk in a fight' – were contrasted to her 'utterly repulsive attitude to De Flores at this point, his "ugliness" making him best suited to her dirty work', as one learner expressed it. Her realisation of De Flores's potential usefulness and 'how she can abuse and manipulate his obsession with her is what sets the "plot" in motion', as one noted, though others added 'she however is not so sharp on the consequences of using De Flores's desire for her, at least until it is too late'. Where such arguments were supported by relevant quotation from the passage and supporting references to the wider text the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular drama text on the paper, with over a quarter of the entry choosing it, the (a) option being the most popular choice.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to choose relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise more or less relevant relationships, with the main focus on Angelo and Isabella, often in more successful answers at this level, contrasting his attitude to her with the attitudes of the Duke and her brother. She was generally seen as 'undervalued by all men' or 'objectified, used and abused', with always a 'lack of the respect due to her status as a nun'. More competent answers also had a general consensus that 'men did not treat women well', although one or two praised 'the Duke for providing a satisfactory outcome for the wronged women'. It was also observed that Claudio was respectful to Juliet and contrasted with the young men who frequented the brothels. In some sound essays there was general condemnation of the hypocrisy

of the men who spoke disparagingly of the women in the brothels but were quite happy to use their services. Angelo, a hypocrite, and the Duke, 'a controlling manipulator of women', however, came in for the most criticism. Some good essays also questioned the 'happy' ending, with marriage not being seen as 'a solution for the women and regarded as a punishment for the men', as one essay argued. Good essays often developed interesting arguments on the morality and 'the politics of the play which underpin the presentation of women in *Measure for Measure*', enjoying, it would seem, debating the different attitudes to gender and sexuality which they saw as interesting from a modern viewpoint. This was an obvious and engaging way into the texts for many good candidates. The best answers embraced the complete social context of the play in its presentation of a domineering and abusive patriarchy and there were some well-argued and incisive discussions of hypocrisy, concealing the social control and objectification of women. These essays, for example analysed the language used by the men – 'virgin', 'maid', 'widow', 'wife', 'punk' and 'whore' - noting how the 'female roles were thus determined from the outset in terms of how they responded to men'. Where such arguments were supported by precise reference to the text and appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

- (b) Learners with an appropriately detailed grasp of the context for this passage were at an advantage in considering how an audience might respond. Nearly every answer recognised this as the 'revelation scene, when justice is served', as one essay described it. Many thought the 'audience will be anticipating justice on Angelo in particular but also on Lucio'. There were occasional misunderstandings in some weaker answers, some candidates assuming that Isabella was obliged to marry the Duke, though others, with more understanding at this level, felt that 'Shakespeare had deliberately made the ending ambiguous' and 'the audience would hope that she would refuse'. The final components of Angelo's role were at times considered inaccurately: for example, Angelo's embracing of the justice of his own execution was sometimes read as if it came *after* the Duke's 'instruction for him to marry Mariana, and he was trying to escape it'. More competent answers had a clear sense of the context: 'This extract, which takes place in the denouement of the play features climatic moments where justice is served as the Duke's disguise is revealed and the reality of Angelo's appearances and deceptions are unravelled publicly', as one learner summarised it. At this level too there was a sound grasp of the dramatic irony throughout the passage, with some noticing the rising tension when the friar is arrested. Good answers also were often able to explore the comedy of the moment when it is Lucio who reveals him. Another feature of stronger responses was the sense of theatre at this moment, 'the snatching of the Friar's hood is a theatrical representation of truth revealed', as one learner suggested. Some good answers, though, found it 'unconvincing that the Duke drags it out so long when he could reveal himself', with one suggesting that 'Shakespeare was working for a big climax but it is not really credible in the end'. One very good answer neatly summarised these opposing views: 'The dramatic tension rising, as lives hang in the balance, is mixed with the comedic irony of the situation.' Other very good answers noted that 'the Duke's decision to remit Lucio's 'other forfeits' shows the characteristic mercy of the resolution'. Some stronger responses focused on 'the restoration of order provided by the Duke's reappearance' and how 'marriage is used as a generic convention to re-establish both the moral order and social hierarchy'. There was also some very good analysis of the dramatic ironies on display: 'The unravelling of the truth that is already known to the audience is a climactic moment for both the characters and the audience.' At this level there was some very good analysis of the drama, for example 'the spectacle of the prostration of Isabella and Mariana to beg for Angelo's life, engineered as it is by a Duke who is *still* holding many significant cards close to his chest', as one put it. Where such arguments were supported by detailed reference to the passage and an awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

This was a relatively popular choice in this session with the majority of responses choosing the (b) passage option.

- (a) Most essays were able to discuss some of Soyinka's choices relevantly, with many noting that 'His choice of Lagos and Nigeria enabled him to develop his satire about political corruption and religious exploitation', as one essay put it. Weaker essays summarised the events in the various settings, often at least implicitly contrasting the 'rented tumbledown shack, where Amope waits for him, with his change to a white framed office', indicating for some learners, Jero's success and growing importance. More competent responses saw the settings as symbolic – 'the beach where there are traders' and 'links to Jesus and fishermen Peter and James'. Others noted that the beach

also represented 'temptations of the flesh in form of the young woman and her transformation', though others argued: 'the Battle for the beach by the authorities for public executions changes Jero into a general and the prophets into an army'. Also symbolic for some was 'jumping out of the window like a common thief', though others explored Jero's rise in fortunes in the later description of his office and Rachel. Other essays were more discursive, considering the effects of the use of the beach at a time when there was a scarcity of land in Lagos, as well as 'the proximity to water for baptism seen in biblical stories'. Very good responses analysed the more humorous scenes at the window of Jero's house and some of the 'slapstick humour of the chases and religious meetings in unlikely places', as one noted. Very good answers also discussed the satire that 'Soyinka gets from the setting of "the church", a place where good should be represented, yet many aspects of hypocrisy and wrongdoings are revealed there instead', as one argued. Where these insights were supported by appropriate references to the text and some awareness of context, the answers were very successful.

- (b) Nearly every response was able to respond relevantly to the given passage and the relationship between Jero, Chume and Amope was explored by most candidates, noting how 'Jero manipulated and lied to Chume'. This led many learners to comment on Jero as 'a false prophet preying on Chume's weaknesses to keep him compliant and giving poor advice on his marital relationship', as one essay summarised it. In some weaker answers, Jero and Chume were viewed as close friends which was why 'Chume could confide in Jero both as a friend and a priest'. More competent answers considered the relationship in a variety of ways: master/servant, labourer/overseer, prophet/follower, for example, were often mentioned. Other sound answers saw how 'Jero manipulates Chume through male stereotypes – violence, misogyny, husband and nagging wife.' Good answers developed this so that 'Chume's subservience to Jero was a comment by Soyinka on how the masses in postcolonial Nigeria had switched from one master (colonial rulers) to another - corrupt religion'. Chume's subservience was often well analysed in good answers, such as 'Jero abuses his trust and his faith, using the language of religion and prophecy to control and confuse him', as one good response expressed it. Some responses saw Jero as a positive influence, but better knowledge had others remembering 'Jero tells Chume to beat her when he finds out she is his creditor for the coat'. Very good answers saw how the 'passage is comic as well as serious', supported with analysis of the physical drama of falling to his knees and Jero's use of abstruse biblical names and the repeated Christian mantra of 'forgive him'. As one very good answer noted 'the underlying satire of a domestic squabble is punctuated by religious cant and through Soyinka's contrast of pidgin English and literate religious language'. Very good answers also made telling use of appropriate contexts and were able to place the passage in the wider text very precisely, enabling a judicious assessment of the significance of the passage to the presentation of the relationship and the play more generally.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was a popular choice in this session, with the majority of learners choosing the passage (b) question.

- (a) Just about every answer found relevant points to make about Brick and at least to a basic level had some opinions on how Williams shapes the audience's response. Weaker answers tended to summarise all they could remember about him and his relationships, especially with Maggie, Skipper and Big Daddy. Better answers at this level were often more of a psychoanalysis of Brick, and indeed Tennessee Williams himself (where contexts were added), rather than an exploration of how the response of the audience was shaped. Although the question specifically states 'an audience', weaker answers often referred to 'readers' and struggled to see Brick as a dramatic construct. There was often detailed textual knowledge and most candidates covered a range of significant points, such as homosexuality, alcoholism and marital failure.

Competent answers discussed the audience's shifting responses to Brick and how Williams manages to 'make him sympathetic while he is doing and saying unattractive things'. This was developed in good responses into discussing, for example, 'his uneasy relationship with the truth despite his disgust towards mendacity'. At this level some interpretations thought 'the audience might have a sympathetic understanding of the difficult relationships that Brick had with both Maggie and Big Daddy', as one suggested, while others focused more on 'his sense of loss and personal blame over Skipper's death'. In nearly every response Brick was seen as the central character in the play around whom the storylines of the other characters revolved. More successful responses kept the 'audience' firmly in view, with some very good answers developing

interpretations of him as a tragic figure, 'because he was the fixed point from which the others were judged, often harshly, by the audience', as one expressed it. Good answers were also aware of contexts, often Williams's own biography, but in some thoughtful responses, how 'the shift in family and sexual politics over the last 70 years means a modern audience is more sensitive to the moral pressures and family dynamics within which Williams creates his anti-hero', as one succinctly expressed it.

- (b) This was the most popular drama question on the paper. Nearly every answer found relevant material with which to address the task, though weaker answers were often more general, focusing on her role and actions in the play as a whole, with too little on the details of the passage to reach beyond the basic level of assessment. Better answers often had strong views on Big Mama's words and actions in the passage, but were divided in their opinions, with some more sympathetic than others. Details such as when she picked up the stockings were used to support both sides – some seeing it as a motherly gesture and others as demonstrating her need for control, for example. More competent answers considered Williams's presentation of her. Some learners saw her as 'more of a cartoon character', with others suggesting 'she is a stereotypical wife of the period'. More aware responses linked her with Maggie as a woman desperate for love and affection from her husband, though interesting points were made on the rivalry between Big Mama and Maggie for Brick's affection. There was much discussion of her appearance and why Williams made her 'comical and frumpy', with some good answers developing arguments around her 'contrasting physically with Maggie's evident attractiveness and sensuality', as one learner noted. This led some good responses into considering her relationship with Big Daddy and his 'revulsion revealed later to Brick', as well as contrasting this relationship with 'the current situation between Brick and Maggie'. Many responses considered her character traits in detail: the lack of privacy and her 'nosiness', insensitivity to others, favouritism for Brick, tenderness to Maggie and her evident love for Big Daddy. Better answers looked at how Williams created attitudes in the audience: 'Her exaggerations – robbers, falling to her knees, vulgarity – suggest a melodramatic character, larger than life literally and metaphorically', as one expressed it. Other good responses noted the ways in which 'Big Mama's physical presence invades and dominates the dramatic space, making Brick and Maggie feel small.' The best answers delved beneath the surface of her words and actions and discussed 'the disparity between Big Mama's external bluster and her inner fragility', as one essay expressed it. Where such arguments were supported by analysis of some of the detail of the passage, awareness of the textual context and a sensitive response to the dramatic effects, the responses invariably did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a very small minority of responses, evenly split across the two options.

- (a) The few responses seen to this question were nearly always able to consider some of the physical conflicts Armitage presents in the text, offering detailed summaries of Sir Gawain's two encounters with the Green Knight and, in more successful answers, of the various hunting scenes. There was also often some awareness of the context for the poem, though weaker answers were confused by the relationship between the 'original version and Armitage's translation', as one learner put it. This led to some confusions about 'the chivalric code and knightly honour' and how a modern audience might view them. More competent answers often considered the ways in which conflict tests Sir Gawain's character and integrity. There were interesting insights into the ways in which inner conflict is just or even more significant than external challenges in the poem. Nearly every response saw conflicts as a representation of 'the virtue of bravery expected of knights' and 'the idea of challenges used in jousts' as one suggested. Nearly every response saw the conflict with the Green Knight as portraying 'the honour of Gawain in being willing to accept his challenge', though his 'acceptance of the shielding girdle represents the triumph of life in the conflict between life and death', as one argued. Generally, though, 'his rejection of the potential conflict of the seductive attempts of the Green Knight's wife', was seen as 'proof of his virtue and chivalry'. In some wider ranging responses, the conflict between King Arthur and Morgan Le Fay were also discussed as a contextual support to other arguments. Successful responses were often well-prepared in terms of content and context, but less so regarding poetic method. Although some

were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse this was rarely integrated into the arguments and other poetic methods such as language and imagery were only rarely mentioned.

- (b) This was a marginally more popular choice on this text. Weaker answers paraphrased some parts of the passage or summarised some of the key events in Arthur's court, with only passing reference to the presentation of the Green Knight which was the focus of the question. Better answers did look at some of the details of Armitage's description with most answers identifying how 'he creates an image of a huge giant in the reader's mind', as one learner expressed it. The effect of his greenness was also discussed with many, and varied, interpretations of its symbolic importance, such as fertility, strength, evil (and goodness for some), the supernatural and natural magic. Answers at all levels did at times consider poetic methods, though weaker answers tended to 'feature spot', with limited success in analysing the effects of, for example, the language or the imagery. Good answers often noted alliteration as 'the organising principle of the verse', but were more judicious when analysing specific moments in the passage and were always focused on the effects of the description on the reader, with some noting the effects on the 'internal audience gathered in Arthur's court, as wonder and disbelief'. A few very good responses considered some of the details in more analytical depth, with one for example discussing how 'the sudden use of "I" to suggest a first-person narrator makes the passage much more immediate and creates a dramatic effect on the reader'. Where such analysis was supported by close reference to the passage, the answers did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice of text with the majority of learners responding to the passage (b) option.

- (a) Most learners were able to choose relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular choices of poems were: *My Last Duchess*, *A Woman's Last Word*, *Meeting at Night*, *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed's Church*, *Porphyria's Lover* and *Love in a Life*. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase and summarise their chosen poems, which were not always particularly relevant to the task. All answers agreed with the given statement and attempted at least in a basic way to show how the poems revealed longing, for example, 'the Bishop wanting a better tomb than his rival and the lover longing for his beloved's total devotion', as one learner suggested. Better answers at this level had detailed knowledge of the selection and were able to support their ideas with accurate references and at times quotations. More competent answers chose appropriate poems in which 'longing is central to the speaker's story', as one suggested. Careful selection helped some sound interpretations to show a range of concerns that Browning developed in this way: love and hate were popular choices, though death, youth and loyalty were often mentioned. Good answers focused as much on Browning's presentation. Many good answers showed understanding of his use of dramatic monologue, with some good analyses exploring the different ways 'longing might reveal itself, in imagery and language', as one noted. Very good answers were able to use their detailed knowledge and understanding to explore the effects of Browning's writing and 'how he puts the reader into the mind and mood of the speaker, whether a psychopathic jealous lover longing to use her poison or the aching sense of loss created by listening to melancholic music', as one essay expressed it. Answers at this level often considered rhythm and verse form in their analysis and where the arguments were supported by detailed references to the poems and some awareness of context the answers did very well.
- (b) Weaker answers at times struggled with basic knowledge and understanding of the poem, offering personally engaged but unsupported readings of the poem as, for example, 'a race to the death for a bottle of wine'. Better answers at this level were able to summarise the events accurately and at times showed awareness of how 'the way the companions fall by the wayside, the death of the horse and the vagueness of the news all help to create tension', as one summarised it. However, many answers at this level asserted it was exciting, rather than showing the poetic means through which excitement is generated. A number of responses lapsed into repetitive comments on multiple examples of excitement, rarely offering a convincing case on how Browning created the sensation. More competent responses did discuss how Browning 'uses time and progression and dynamic rhythms', with other good answers analysing the use of rhyme and traditional story telling techniques, 'such as the first-person narrator and the giving of names to places and animals'. Very good answers developed such ideas, for example, looking at how 'the personification of the sun/nature as needing to witness events creates the same effect in the reader'. Others explored the effects of the 'succession of names and places, the charging rhythm, suggesting the galloping

horses', as one learner expressed it. Some very good analyses of the effects of Browning's rhythmic patterns and the full rhymes, especially where supported by detailed reference to the poem, revealed sophisticated understanding and perceptive awareness of Browning's poetic art and were very successful.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with nearly every learner choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** The very few learners who tackled this question often had at least a sound knowledge of the selection and were able to choose relevant poems with which to address it. Popular choices were *February*, *Cold Knap Lake*, *Hare in July* and *Burning Nettles*. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen poems, with success determined by how well the supporting commentary was shaped to the task. More competent answers chose their material carefully to show the different kinds of power with which Clarke is concerned, 'from the urge to kill to the ability to soothe broken hearts and minds', as one learner put it. Good answers did look more closely at the 'writing and its effects', analysing Clarke's use of language 'sometimes sinister and at other times moving, like when the seal leaves her pup', as one learner stated. Other good responses considered imagery and personification to good effect, with some noting how 'Clarke often uses the vulnerability of humans in the natural world, such as the girl in the lake', as one essay suggested. When such interpretations were supported by specific reference to the text and some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did well.
- (b)** This was the more popular choice on this text. Some weaker answers were unsure about the basic meaning of the poem and often had confused understanding of some important elements, such as 'the poem is morbid as the man has made her a coffin'. Better answers at this level did understand that 'the box is an extended metaphor to explore her relationship', as one suggested. More competent answers discussed 'its strength, the hard work to build it and the memories and emotions inside it', as one essay put it. Good answers analysed the use of imagery – 'golden', 'bright key' and 'black books' were all well explored, for example and one essay explained usefully that 'sanded, oiled and planed' was not in the correct order and why that was significant to the poem's meaning. Very good answers were able to develop interpretations successfully, for example noting the 'clever synergy between the box and the poem – the box is the poem and the poem is about the box'. At this level, learners were often sensitive to the intimacy made public by the box and some viewed *The Box* as akin to the enigmatic nature of 'Pandora's Box', albeit without an evil aspect'. For others, the solidity of the 'golden oak' was considered 'to represent the solid foundation of the person's marriage and relationship with her husband', as one essay expressed it. The four walls of the box were also seen to 'symbolise a protective barrier keeping the secrets within the twelve books contained within the box, but to be revealed to those left behind'. Where such arguments were well supported by appropriate analysis of Clarke's poetic methods and precise reference to the poem, the answers always did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** There were only a few essays seen on this question. Nearly every answer showed at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the selection. Popular choices of poems were *In the Park*, *Winter Song*, *Father Returning Home* and *Growing Old*. Weaker answers at times found it difficult to shape their responses to the demands of the question, offering general summaries of poems that they knew. More competent answers were able to contrast the presentation in the two poems chosen, sometimes implicitly, but with some awareness of how poets shape meaning through their choices. For some learners '*Growing Old* emphasised the physical aspects of growing old, including loss of beauty and strength', as one summarised it. Other responses noted that in '*Father Returning Home* the divisions between generations were seen to represent the impact of aging', as well as 'the fact that we appreciate different situations differently as we age'. Good answers looked closely at poetic methods, most often language and imagery, though only rarely were the effects of these methods analysed. Only a very few learners seemed confident in analysing other poetic methods, such as form and metre, even where the poems chosen were very different in these

aspects.

- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper. Nearly every answer found some relevant points to make and had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem on which to base their interpretation. Weaker answers, even with some partial understanding, often drifted into unfocused paraphrasing of the poem. There were also many straightforward responses that began reasonably but lapsed into repetition and descriptive commentary. At this level, those who kept the focus on the water tended to do better overall than those who also explored general contextual points on Dharker's mixed heritage, for example. There were some very weak responses that had gaps in their knowledge of the poem, suggesting for example that 'all the water comes from a god in a genuine miracle', as one put it. These essays seemed to be responding as to an unseen poem. More competent answers recognised that 'it's about how the Community is experiencing a shortage of water', and considered the extreme conditions. This led some into seeing the poem as a 'social commentary condemning societies which did not provide vital services for their poorest members', as one essay said, while other learners considered that 'we in richer countries take water for granted', with some good analysis of the 'municipal pipe' noted in a number of essays. The extreme conditions were well explored in good essays, citing the 'poverty shown by words such as naked, huts, tin mugs, small bones', as one essay suggested. Getting the opening image of the land splitting (rather than skin) enabled good essays to analyse the contrasts between the landscape and the appearance of the adults and children living in poverty. Other good essays were alive to the effects of the religious language and imagery – 'blessing', 'congregation', 'kindly god' often very well discussed at this level. For others the 'imagery of the utensils shows universality of the need – for rich and poor, old and young', according to one. Very good answers analysed the 'conversational tone – "imagine the drip" – her use of enjambement', which 'gave fluidity to the poem about water' and the length of the stanzas. Strong answers focused on form and structure, such as enjambment and free verse, linking these aspects to the narrative of the poem, which for many was 'the impact of poverty and the deprivation of small communities of a vital commodity such as water, as one put it. Where such arguments were linked to appropriate contexts and supported by detailed reference to the poem the answers did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was the most popular text in **Section C**, with about an equal take up of the two options.

- (a) Most learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text on which to base their essays. Weaker essays summarised what Briony did in the novel, with some confusion in very weak essays on those parts of the novel which were 'genuine fiction and those which are Briony's imaginations', as one summarised it. Better answers however did explore the point at which 'her fantasies blur into her reality', whilst others saw that her 'childhood fantasy world is dangerous', as one learner stated. This distinction between the 'Briony who wants to be older', where she sometimes shows 'a stark maturity in constructing worlds in her mind', as one expressed it, and her later 'adult fictions for Robbie and Celia's love', was often well considered in good essays. Very good essays had a perceptive understanding of McEwan's use of 'metafiction to show the dangerous power of Briony's imagination', as one essay put it. Some learners thought 'she is able through her words, to effectively erase the consequences of her crime at least in her own mind', though others thought 'the dangerous power of her imagination is to be able to transform fiction into truth', as one candidate said. Where these arguments were supported by close reference to the text and some awareness of contexts, the answers did well.
- (b) Weaker answers at times struggled with placing this episode in the wider text, though most had at least a partial knowledge and understanding of Emily's role and character in the novel. More capable responses recognised that 'Emily's vivid and explicit thoughts here reflect her inability to take control of anything', according to one, though others noted this was Briony's 'harsh perspective of her mother, when she's trying to vindicate her own culpability for the crime through this portrayal,' as one learner argued. Other sound answers explored her presentations as 'a mother who therefore worries about her children here because they're not doing what she wants them to do', as one essay commented, though others suggested 'she has resentment for her children', and 'sees everyone's faults but her own'. Emily was also seen as a woman of her time, 'resenting changes and the freedoms her daughter enjoyed'. Very good answers considered

elements of the writing in detail – a key point in this novel being ‘establishing the credentials of the narrator at this point’, as one suggested. Other very good essays considered language, narrative voice, the use of stream of consciousness and lack of paragraphs. Where analysis of these methods was supported by appropriate reference to the passage and some awareness of context, the answers did well.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG’O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with very few answers seen on option (a).

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Weaker answers summarised the whole of the story with only occasional reference to the given passage. Better answers at this level were aware of the significance of the passage to the wider text and were able to explore the ‘cruel and unfair judgements of social divisions which Mansfield sets out’, while for others, Kezia is ‘the gate to social acceptance’ and contrasted with Aunt Beryl’s ‘unworthiness and sense of entitlement’. More competent answers discussed how the extract ‘juxtaposes issues of class with a sense of hope and change’, as one suggested and there were some engaged discussions on Mansfield’s concerns. Others argued that the children are all the same: ‘the Burnell children are taught to avoid the others to maintain standards and reputation, the Kelveys to avoid getting hurt’. Good answers considered Mansfield’s methods in more detail, how ‘she uses Kezia’s perspective to show the reader how the Kelveys come into clearer focus’, as one learner put it. Other good essays explored the use of dialogue, contrasted the language of the girls with the ‘cold, furious voice’ of Aunt Beryl and were often alive to the way ‘Mansfield manipulates the tone and the mood with a single word or phrase, “squeezed through” for example showing how the Kelveys were crushed and made small like vermin escaping the cat’, as one learner suggested. Such analysis, when supported by secure knowledge and understanding of the text and precise references, did very well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

- 1 Learners should move beyond 'feature spotting' in their essays in order to develop more precise analysis.
- 2 The genre of any given text is an important starting point for any interpretations offered by the learners.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of assessment on all but a very few questions. The vast majority of learners had at least a straightforward knowledge of their chosen texts on which to build their responses, with some confidence in selecting material with which to address the tasks. There were very few rubric errors in this session and very few learners appeared to have misjudged the timing of their essays. The most popular texts were Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some learners were at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing. While stronger responses used literary terms effectively and wrote in an appropriate register, there were examples of colloquial language such as 'Armitage kind of makes it seem like this dude is not scared of anything.'

There are two specific issues to be addressed this session:

- (1) There were a number of learners who chose passage questions and adopted a quite restrictive approach to their given task. Often using apt literary terminology, these responses became a list of features, almost from the start of the essay, stating that 'x' was an asyndeton and 'y' was personification, for example. However, the ways in which the writer's choices added to the meaning of the text and the effects created by these choices were often ignored, so that these essays became assertive and often not clearly addressing the question. Analysis at this level should be informed by an overview of the meaning of the text or passage so that the significance of the writer's choices can be integrated into a wider discussion of the specific topic given in the question.
- (2) Many learners, when discussing their texts, ignore its specific genre as a play, a poem, a novel or story, perhaps in their haste to discuss language and imagery, for example. An appreciation of some of the generic qualities of a text, however, can be very helpful in supporting a focus on key elements, which will nearly always be relevant and should shape their discussions. In drama, this might be the interaction of audience and actors, in poetry, it might be the particular poetic form and in prose, the narrative voice. Asking themselves a question such as 'why did the writer choose this specific interaction (an aside for example) at this point in the play', would lead some learners to a more directed analysis and a more relevant interpretation of other literary features. The basic components of the genre of the text should be an essential consideration in the learner's interpretation of any text or passage, perhaps even before the more precise analysis of language, for example, is undertaken.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was the second most popular drama text on the paper, with the majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** Nearly every answer had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of Isabella's role and character and was able to offer some personal response. Very weak answers retold as much of her story as they could with little awareness of the focus of the question. Better answers at this level shaped their chosen material to address the task in a straightforward way. Few answers were confident enough to challenge the given assertion, though some wondered if 'her view of a cloistered life might not be extreme or even masochistic'. Others thought that the Duke might be liberating her from this, but generally learners offered flat character readings at this level. More competent answers however were more varied in their opinions. Isabella's desire to be a nun was seen as surprising as 'she is presented as a strong-minded woman', though some learners thought Isabella 'represents the human tendency towards extremes – her celibacy is as impossible as Lucio's debauchery', as one learner argued. Good answers saw her decision in terms of its effects on others as well, as she is 'abused by at least 3 men, perhaps even Lucio too, because she is pure and virtuous', as one suggested. Very good answers developed such arguments by looking closely at her language: 'her sadomasochism in her language to Angelo is disturbing', an argument proposed by many, as was her 'desire for more restrictions in the convent'. Other very good answers contrasted 'her reaction to Claudio – "beast" and "incestuous" – with her reaction to the "bed-trick" – "the image of it gives her content", both of which are quite disturbing', according to one very good response. Others suggested that becoming a nun was a way of avoiding her fear of her own sexuality. And whilst most learners agreed that it did cause problems, it was only 'because of the male characters and the prevailing attitudes to women and sex in Vienna', as one learner summarised it. There were also discussions on whether her desire to become a nun made her more protective and conscious of her purity and chastity, 'which is at the root of the conflicts in the play and naturally is problematic in a place like Vienna'. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text and appropriate contextualisation, the answers did very well.
- (b)** Almost all of the responses to this question had some knowledge and understanding of the two characters and some personal opinions on which to base their essays. Weaker answers often reverted to narrative and summary, often quite detailed and knowledgeable about Lucio and the Duke generally. Better answers at this level were able to discuss humour, comic relief and irony in a useful and direct way, with some learners linking it to the revelation of the Duke at the end of the play. More competent answers saw 'the conundrum of Lucio's foul-mouthed abuse of the Duke with his caring for Claudio and the Duke', as one essay noted. Other sound answers noted 'the Duke's inability to keep cool and his self-defence', whilst others contrasted 'his easiness with Claudio's fate and Lucio's concern about it'. Good answers explored the different kinds of irony: 'Situational, dramatic and linguistic', as one suggested, often with telling use of quotation and reference to the wider text. Very good answers developed such discussions with insight: 'it was dishonest of the Duke to allow Lucio to continue his critical views as he was unaware of the true identity of the person he was addressing', one suggested. Others viewed the Duke as insecure and therefore a representation of the instability in Vienna at the time in which the play was set. This led some into wondering if Lucio's accusations of the Duke's alleged sexual misconduct had some substance. Very good answers linked such ideas to the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases and the large number of brothels that had opened in Vienna. Very good responses related the flaws of both characters to the difficulty of administering justice more generally. There was also good analysis of language and tone, as well as, in the strongest answers, a good grasp of the dramatic qualities of this scene. However, some thought Lucio's lines were in prose but not those of the Duke, as a

general way of distinguishing those of higher rank, though this was not really applicable to the given passage.

Question 3

WOLE SOYINKA: *The Trials of Brother Jero and Jero's Metamorphosis*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular drama text on the paper, with the vast majority of learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) Nearly every response found relevant material with which to address the task, showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the text. Weaker answers often focused on unrequited and unfulfilled love as a secret desire which was impacting on different characters – ‘Brick’s love for Skipper, Maggie’s love for Brick and Big Mama’s love for Big Daddy’, as one summarised it. Better answers at this level discussed the characters in turn, suggesting the ‘secret desires which motivate them’, as one put it. Most learners focused on Brick and his secret desires, variously defined as: for Skipper/homosexuality, for past athletic glory, for oblivion and to forget, for a second chance, for Maggie to leave him and for honesty. Other more straightforward answers considered other characters. Popular choices were Maggie’s desire for wealth and Brick’s love (or attention and lust) and Big Daddy’s desires to live, to get back his youth and ‘to be the main man again’, as one learner suggested. Better answers distinguished between desires quite openly displayed such as Maggie’s need for Brick and Mae/Gooper’s need to be in control of the wealth/plantation and more ‘secret’ desires, such as ‘Brick’s repressed homosexuality’. This led more competent responses to link to appropriate contexts, though at times in imprecise, generalised ways. Good answers noted the dramatic effects of these concerns: ‘Whether secret or public, Tennessee Williams highlights this negative emotion running through the Pollitt family as the main cause of conflict in the play’, as one learner expressed it. Other good responses developed such ideas well. ‘Through the characters’ desires for love and wealth, and the destructive effects of acting upon such longing, the playwright portrays the great danger of actions driven by raw, uncontrolled emotions’, as one essay suggested. In focusing on the characters and their interactions, however, few learners considered other dramatic methods in any detail, such as Williams’s use of language and changes in tone and mood. There was also at times too little recognition of the work as a dramatic construct; learners often responded personally to the characters’ situations but with too little awareness of a theatre audience and the dramatic effects created by the actions on a stage.
- (b) All of the responses to this task had some relevant opinions on the two characters. Nearly every response was able to place the passage in the wider text and in many cases showed some knowledge and understanding of the significance of the wider exchange between Maggie and Brick at this point in the play. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the passage or summarise the relationship and the characters. There is a tendency for weaker candidates to see characters as one dimensional and better responses were able to see the complexity of the characterisation and the relationship and not just see ‘Maggie as after Big Daddy’s money’ or ‘Brick as a repressed homosexual’; weaker responses were often unable to develop beyond such simplistic summaries. More competent responses were aware of the key issues in the context of the wider play – Skipper, Big Daddy’s will, Mae and Gooper’s ambitions and Maggie’s childlessness were all well discussed. Many learners discussed the communication difficulties here and their effect in the play generally: ‘Maggie and Brick’s struggle to communicate leads to rising tensions and in their bedroom, symbolic of the nature of the underlying breakdown’. For others ‘what is not said is also significant’, as one put it, with many noticing the ‘build up to the first mention of Skipper’. Good answers focused on Williams’s methods of characterisation: for example, ‘Maggie’s victimising herself, perhaps because of guilt over Skipper’, as one essay suggested. Brick was also well analysed: ‘His lifelessness and solidity, his unresponsiveness, all symbolised in his name’, as one learner suggested. Good answers developed such arguments through close reference to the text and Williams’s methods, noting Maggie’s different strategies to get Brick’s attention, which ‘ultimately leads to her revelation of Big Daddy’s cancer’, as one learner noted. His indifference becomes ‘cruelty in asking if she wants to be alone’, as one argued, with some learners linking this to his

decision to tell Big Daddy he has cancer. Very good answers considered Williams's dramatic methods in detail, the contrast, for example between 'his emotionless responses and indifference and her emotional journey and engagement'. Other responses noted that 'her true emotions are shown in the stage directions (hence to the audience) rather than spoken aloud to Brick', as one learner argued. Some good essays looked at language in detail: 'His repetitive use of "Maggie" gives him a passive/aggressive tone', according to one, while others analysed her self-awareness: 'hideous transformation' and 'catty' were often very well discussed. There were sensitive readings of both characters at this level: 'Brick and Maggie are both isolated – Brick because of his grief and withdrawal into alcoholism and Maggie by her unfulfilled desire to be loved and to have a baby', as one essay summarised it. Others wondered how the audience might respond as the passage unfolds, for example, to the way in which Brick looks at Maggie making her feel that she is physically repugnant: 'Does this build sympathy for Maggie as well as understanding for Brick?' one learner wondered, 'especially as his repugnance is visually contrasted to her obviously sensual beauty'. Such musings were often supported by precise references to the passage, as well as analytical perception and the essays were both successful and engaging.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with learners choosing equally between the two options.

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Lady Bertilak was often the main discussion point, with weaker answers summarising her role and character in the poem, though often without considering Armitage's presentation. Better answers also discussed Morgan Le Faye and Guinevere, with some learners remembering that 'in Camelot Sir Gawain sits by Guinevere'. There was often some contextual support for the learners' opinions. For example, 'it was believed that women were naturally sinful, responsible for the fall of men', with many answers linking the exchanges between Lady Bertilak and Sir Gawain to the story of Adam and Eve. Good answers developed such arguments, noting that 'whilst the Green Knight sets up the temptation of Gawain, the blame falls on his Lady who is presented as a temptress', as one essay expressed it. Other good essays explored Gawain's misogynistic outburst to the Green Knight at the end which for some was 'important to evaluate the way chivalry judged women'. The religious undertone here, again to Adam and Eve, was also seen as important. Very good learners also noted how 'the Chivalric code and its demands of unflinching courtesy to women inevitably effect the way men (and the readers) view the women', as one essay argued. There were relatively few responses that were convincing in analysing Armitage's methods of presentation. One noted that 'Guinevere and Lady Bertilak are often portrayed as physically above Sir Gawain', but, although some were able to discuss Armitage's alliterative verse, this was rarely integrated into the arguments and other poetic methods such as language and imagery were very rarely mentioned.
- (b) Learners who could place the passage in context were at an advantage in discussing its significance in terms of the relationship and the poem more generally. Weaker answers summarised the 'wager' between the two men and often showed secure knowledge of the text, sometimes at the cost of paying too little attention to the passage. Better answers at this level noted it was the first exchange of the wager and so 'significant in terms of themes – honour, truthfulness, chivalry', as one learner noted. The relationship between Gawain and the master was often seen as one of great courtesy as they exchanged winnings, with some noting that 'the master is seen to be testing Gawain's knightly virtues and together they're setting up rules for the game the following day'. Good answers developed these arguments. The passage was about 'the keeping of boundaries, to stop the host's prying, by Sir Gawain's refusal to share information'. Other good answers placed the passage firmly in context: 'Knowing the host is the Green Knight and his wife a "honeytrap" to catch Sir Gawain out is very helpful', as one learner argued. Strong answers also discussed some of Armitage's methods: 'All the people are summoned to what seems like a trial of Sir Gawain', as one suggested, whilst others noted the 'atmosphere of a cross-examination'. Further analysis led to comments such as 'the Lord's questions end in full stops and not question marks and suggest, as we later find out is the truth, he already knows the answers'. Many good responses explored the 'relaxed comfortable sharing relationship as they chat and laugh in front of the fire', as one learner suggested. Alliteration and repetition were often noted as creating the tone and comfortable atmosphere, with some noting that 'the dialogue was used for immediacy and description for detail and shaping the reader's response'. Where such arguments

were supported by detailed reference to the passage and appropriate awareness of contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 6

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was the least popular text in **Section B** with only a small number of responses, the vast majority of which chose the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) There were too few responses to be able to make a general comment on performance on this question.
- (b) Nearly every response to this question had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem and was able to share an engaged personal response. Weaker answers tended to summarise ‘the love situation’ as a way of explaining the speaker’s emotions. Better answers at this level were aware of Browning’s use of dramatic monologue and were able to explore the ‘dramatic qualities as the situation in the laboratory is gradually revealed through her words and supposed actions’, according to one learner. More competent responses were aware of the ‘tone’ with some enjoying the ‘maniacal glee of the speaker’, for example. Good answers charted the woman’s increasing madness as ‘her desire for power and revenge becomes overwhelming’, as one noted. Others were more sympathetic to her situation, analysing her motives, with some well-argued responses viewing the narrator as a sympathetic, even tragic, figure. Very good answers focused on Browning’s methods, analysing the effects of the dramatic monologue, the speaker’s choice of diction, her shifting moods ‘suggestive of her tormented maddened state of mind’, as one suggested and ‘the scientific language of the laboratory so at odds with her crazed words of hate and revenge’, as one noted. Where the learners supported such points with specific reference to the poem and an awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 7

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice overall, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) There were only a very few responses to this question. Nearly all learners were able to select relevant poems with which to address the task. Popular pairings were *Journey* and *Catrin*, *Scything* and *Catrin*. *Journey* was also paired with a number of more or less relevant poems, such as *Pipistrelle* and *Seal*, though learners struggled to make the seal and pup and ‘the life of the bat and the bumps on the road’ relevant to the task. Some responses to these poems did consider broadly the metaphorical implications of Clarke’s choices. Better answers noted that ‘it was not usually a straightforward discussion’, as Clarke’s concerns ‘are always hidden in metaphors and patterns’, as one learner summarised it. *Catrin* was the most popular choice, with most learners having secure knowledge and understanding of the poem, exploring ‘the unbreakable bond between a mother and daughter relationship, represented through the symbolism of the umbilical cord’, as one essay suggested. Learners linked the poem to *Seal* and *Scything* through the umbilical cord, with better answers analysing its symbolic relevance. Other essays contrasted this mother/daughter relationship with other relationships such as the husband/wife in *My Box* – also viewed symbolically as representing ‘the containment and privacy of a loving relationship between a man and woman’, as one learner suggested. The pairing of *Catrin* with *Journey* was productive, the contrasting relationships in these poems helping learners explore the range of Clarke’s concerns and in the strongest essays, her methods. Few essays were able to get beyond her use of language and imagery, though these were often examined in good detail. Those that did discuss poetic form, tone and narrative voice often did very well, especially where the arguments were rooted in detailed reference to the poems and an appropriate awareness of context.
- (b) This option had far more responses than **(a)** and all but a few learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding on which to build their responses to ‘the warmth and comfort of the home contrasted to the bleak and inhospitable setting’, as one learner summarised it. A few very weak responses struggled with some of the language and meaning, ‘the cottage has evidently burnt down’, for example, inevitably led to very limited interpretations. Better answers considered the details carefully: ‘the rudimentary life, bare of modern superficialities, which Clarke uses as a symbol for a simple more satisfying style of living’, was a typical comment on her overall concerns.

These interpretations were often more successful where there was a clear grasp of the overall meaning and concerns on which to structure the analysis, e.g. ‘the use of Welsh names and references to two languages to give a historical and grounded sense of the cottage’, as one learner suggested. Competent answers saw how the ‘absence of modern amenities means she and the reader are more aware of the natural beauty and grandeur’, as one learner argued. Good answers explored some of Clarke’s methods in detail. The single stanza (‘shows life here is unending and without breaks’), the ‘simplicity and directness of the opening’, and the ‘understatement of “it’s not easy”’ were all well analysed. Other good responses noted how she ‘engages all our senses: the taste (of nettles) and smell (of sheep) are unpleasant and not welcoming’ was contrasted to her use of imagery and colours to create mood and tone, such as ‘the superficiality of “brochure blues” that contrasted with the simple grandeur of the brown and green mountains’. Other very good answers considered a wide range of poetic methods such as Clarke’s use of listing, conversational tone, free verse and short, stopped lines – all of which were ‘used to show the simplicity of life in this place’, as one essay argued. Some very good answers noticed that the structure and language become more complex – ‘there is more to rural Wales than meets the eye’, as one suggested. Others saw a key concern as ‘physically connecting people to the countryside’ and how the difficulty of living in the countryside ‘breaks down the often romanticised view of country life’, as one learner expressed it. Very good answers were alive to her ‘conversational tone, her personal engagement, so that speaker and poet become one’, as one good essay argued. Many very good answers had a developed sense of context and of the wider text which helped them reach judicious assessments of the significance of this poem to understanding Clarke as a poet more generally.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular **Section B** text, though the vast majority of learners chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a)** This was not a popular question and the range of poems discussed was quite limited, with *In the Park*, *Stabat Mater*, *The Lost Woman...* and *an afternoon nap* being very popular choices. Less successful were those learners who selected poems with little relevance to the given task, such as *She was a Phantom of Delight* and perhaps more desperately *The Storm-Wind* from **Question 8(b)**. Weaker responses were usually able to summarise their chosen poems in at least straightforward detail, with often a basic understanding of the meaning and the poem’s relevance to the task. There were some sensitive readings of the poems. For example, *In the Park*: ‘the mother is viewed as a caring mother who wants her children to be happy in the moment’, whilst other answers recognised that the burden of care often falls on the mother. Other learners were critical of the ambitious mother’s toxicity and lack of compassion towards her son when his grades were poor’. In *an afternoon nap*, some thought the mother ‘was struggling with the isolation of being a single parent and not enjoying motherhood’, as one learner expressed it. There were few good essays on this question and they all moved beyond the context and meaning of the poems to consider the poetic methods used, with some good analysis of the contrasting use of poetic voice and language, for example. Where these were linked to the learner’s interpretation of the poems and supported by precise references, the essays did well.
- (b)** This was a popular choice of question and nearly all learners were able to engage with Barnes’s evocative descriptions of the wind. Weaker answers discussed the wind as ‘intimidating and frightening as the vegetation writhes and quivers’, as one learner suggested. Better answers at this level saw the contrast of ‘the outdoors’ wildness and nature with home, the indoors and calm comfort’, as one essay put it. More competent responses saw the personification of the wind so that it had ‘a destination to reach and was in a hurry to get there’. It was also seen as being symbolic of life where people rush along causing destruction in their hurry. Good answers observed the poem’s form and the shape of the lines, the movement across the stanzas and Barnes’s use of rhymes. A fruitful discussion point in good essays was the structure: ‘3 verses – nature, humans and the speaker – with a volta at the end of stanza 2’, as one learner summarised it. Very good answers analysed the effects of other poetic methods such as alliteration and rhyme which ‘reinforce how the wind has changed between stanza 1 and 3’, as one learner noted. The neat structure of the poem lent itself to developed, structured argument and more successful learners took full advantage, often supporting their discussion with well-tailored critical support. Some very good responses took their interpretations of the poem to another level, suggesting metaphors for life’s struggle and endurance, some of which were more convincing than others, depending on the manner in which such ideas were argued and expressed. Most successful were those learners who could analyse some of the detail in depth, for example ‘the contrast of the wind’s “wild-blowing” and

“her babe sigh”, as one noted, which ‘separates nature and human experience and concerns so graphically’. At this level, analysis of poetic methods was often supported with precise references to the poem and integrated into a well-reasoned and structured interpretation of the poem. Such responses always did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was not a popular text in **Section C**, with the majority of the few learners choosing this text opting for the passage **Question (b)**.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) The few learners who tackled this question often had at least a straightforward knowledge of the context to the passage and were able to assess how the characters were presented here with the role in the text more widely. Very weak answers seemed to suggest that the rape had already happened, with a consequent limitation on interpretations offered. Better answers at this level tended to summarise their views on the various characters generally with some detailed knowledge of the text in support. More competent responses were aware, for example, of ‘Briony’s obsession with Robbie’s abuse of Cecilia, as seen at the fountain and in the library’, as one expressed it. Others noted that Briony’s attempt to support Pierrot ‘was rooted in her attitude to Robbie’, and others noted ‘the unusual act from Emily as a mother actually getting involved’. Good responses examined McEwan’s methods. His use of dialogue, rhetorical questions and personal pronouns were all well analysed by some learners at this level. A clear grasp of the context helped other good answers to explore how the ‘ordinariness of discussing the weather is contrasted with what is going on in the characters’ heads’, as one put it, though for some ‘their behaviour is a symptom that all have a dark secret to hide’, as another suggested. Where these points were supported by detailed reference to the passage and the text, with some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 10

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG’O: *Petals of Blood*

There were too few responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance on either option.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session with very few answers seen and nearly all on option **(b)**, the passage question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few essays seen on this question. Nearly all learners recognised this was near the end of the story. Most essays understood the nature and tone of a ghost story ‘with its sense of horror and mystery’, as one suggested, though for some ‘Wharton solves the mystery of the ghost by having Mr Brympton see it, but leaves the reader with another – why does Mrs Brympton die and what is Mr Brympton’s secret,’ as one summarised it. Such opinions led weaker answers into a lot of speculation about the story generally, often at the expense of more detailed exploration of the given passage. Good answers considered the use of first person narrator – ‘unreliable and we only get her version of events’, as one noted. This led other learners to consider her state of mind here, with some linking their discussions to ‘her fever and therefore fever-based hallucinations’, as one noted. Good answers always kept the focus on the detail of the passage. The use of dialogue and telling details such as the bell and the sudden appearance of Mr Brympton were well discussed, and other good essays were able to consider the effects of Wharton’s use of language and

contrasting sentence structures very well. When these discussions were supported by precise references to the passage and a secure knowledge and understanding of the wider story, the answers always did very well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

This was a minority choice of text in this session, with only a very few learners choosing the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** There were only a few responses to this question, with most learners having at least some awareness of the context and Huck's situation. Most responses offered a summary of the events surrounding the death of Boggs, with better answers at this level aware of the significance of, for example the change in the crowd's mood at the end of the passage and the potential lynching. Only a few competent essays considered any of Twain's methods, though Huck as the narrator was at least mentioned. Better answers questioned his reliability and to some extent his language and how 'Twain describes the action through the eyes of the shocked, and excited, boy', as one noted. There were very few attempts to consider the effects of Twain's methods of presentation and this inevitably limited the overall success of the essays.