

Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

GCSE English Literature (5ET03)
Shakespeare and Contemporary
Drama

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General Overview:

Summer 2015 marked the penultimate submission of the controlled assessment units for GCSE English Language and Literature and although some centres will be glad to move away from this particular mode of assessment, and despite the challenges the new specification may hold, the positive comments received via training events and online forums, illustrates how centres are responding positively to Pearson Edexcel's new suite of exams from September 2015.

Significant changes occurred this summer to the question structure, content, mark scheme and Assessment Objectives (AOs) and the moderation team commented on how well many centres adapted to these changes.

Task 1: Shakespeare

Question Structure/Content: 3 out of 4 topic areas (Characterisation, Performance, Theme, Relationships) were available for centres to select as the Controlled Assessment task. These will be alternated next year.

AOs/Marks: Previously AO2 (10 marks) and AO3 (20 marks) were targeted for this task. For 2015 this has changed to AO3 (20 marks) and AO4 (20 marks). The total marks available for the Shakespeare task has increased from 30 to 40.

Mark Scheme: The shift in focus from AO2 to AO4 meant that in order for students to satisfy the AO4 requirements, they had to relate texts to their social, cultural and historical contexts and be able to explain how texts have been influential and significant to self and other readers in different contexts and at different times.

The mark schemes have been amended to include 'both the Shakespeare play and the adaptation' within the bands. Students needed to ensure that they answered on both or there was a ceiling on the amount of marks they could achieve for this response.

Task 2: Contemporary Drama

Preparation: Centres had to choose from the list of 9 contemporary texts that were printed in the new 2013 specification.

Question Structure/Content: 3 out of the 4 topic areas (Characterisation, Performance, Theme, Relationships) were available for centres to select as the Controlled Assessment task. These will alternate next year.

AOs/Marks: The total marks available have decreased from 20 to 16 and the mark scheme has been amended to reflect the new question total.

Following last year's online and face to face meetings, moderators reported general improvements in the way students' work was presented, annotated and moderated by most centres. The majority of centres had applied a consistent and rigorous approach to annotation, which helped to illuminate features of their students' responses and these annotations were couched in the language of the band criteria. Some moderators did find examples of single word marginalia

such as 'character', 'context' or 'textual evidence', which is of very little help and one or two centres were still submitting un-annotated scripts, which made the job of the moderator ascertaining how the mark was arrived at extremely difficult.

The most effective centres were those who had been thoughtful when setting tasks and allowed students the opportunity to address all the assessment criteria enabling them to achieve the higher band marks. Similarly a number of centres adapted the assessment objectives into more student friendly versions. The addition of basic stems: 'ensure you write about... within your response' helped guide the students and ensured they covered all the AO requirements. It was also noted this year, as in previous years, that some very able students are not being helped by over-scaffolding approaches. The band 5 descriptor refers to 'perceptive and different ways of expressing meaning'. If students are given a 'set' of textual references it is difficult to see how they can explore the texts in a more perceptive fashion and therefore meet the criterion. An approach where the response is chunked into sections relating to the AOs might be of more use for candidates aiming for a band 2 response.

Where moderators found it difficult to confirm centre marks it was usually the case that there was inadequate coverage of a particular component within the mark scheme. This was particularly noticeable with AO4 on the Shakespeare task, where students had failed to provide an 'explanation of the relevance of the play and the adaptation to different audiences at different times'. AO4 is marked out of 20 and by failing to address this bullet point, candidates would be significantly penalised. Bolted on pseudo facts and generalisations such as 'women were always weaker and less important than men in 17th century' show little understanding of how a particular female role is presented within the play. Similarly, claims that audiences would have been shocked by thumb-biting and secret marriages in Romeo and Juliet and the use of witches in Macbeth or how unusual Lady Macbeth's dominance was presented is too general. These assumptions were often followed by reference to a modern audience's acceptance of such things, which may be clear in understanding, but would not be considered sustained or a perceptive understanding of the context.

Range and suitability of topics/tasks/titles

As in previous years the most popular choice of texts remained the same with the majority of centres choosing:

Shakespeare

Romeo and Juliet

Macbeth

Much Ado

The Merchant of Venice

Contemporary drama

An Inspector Calls

A View from the Bridge

Journey's End

The most popular tasks were those of character or relationship for Shakespeare and character or theme for the contemporary drama. Very few schools attempted performance for the contemporary drama.

A number of moderators reported that centres were being far more flexible with the texts and tasks selected for their candidates. In the past, a high proportion of centres went for the same task and focus for all students – a one size fits all scenario; however there was far more evidence of differentiation this series. One particular centre had in the past studied *The Merchant of Venice* with the entire cohort. Recommendations were made by the moderator last year that the task selected was too challenging for the less able and suggested introducing alternative texts depending on ability. It was noted that the same centre had taken on this advice and selected *Romeo and Juliet* for a few of its candidates this year, which enabled them to engage far better with the text and produce well written responses.

Some centres seemed not to have familiarised themselves with the new assessment criteria despite regular updates by Pearson Edexcel, through their website; 2014 PM report and training events. It was felt that AO4 was not sufficiently integrated within the Shakespeare task responses and in many cases acted as a bolt-on paragraph and nothing more. Many centres were still advising candidates to discuss language, form and structure (AO2), which is no longer required for this unit. Despite previous advice in 2013 and 2014, there are still a large number of responses seen where the candidates are including unnecessary detailed context in AO1, which is not required.

Within the Shakespeare task, it was sometimes the case that it was difficult to assess whether the students had read the full text. They frequently gave more focus to the adaptation than the original play, and it seems it may be a challenge to cover the full texts for some centres. This was not the case with the Contemporary drama task, where most students were able to range widely throughout the text.

The approach to AO1 was much more straightforward for students and the marking of this task was far more accurate within centres. Many students engaged with the texts well, and more, higher band responses were seen. The top band students excelled in this component, using an incisive analytical style, with a range of well-chosen quotations and insightful interpretations.

Character essays were very popular choices, but there again, some middle to lower band students were inclined to submit a list of characteristics rather than to look at the development of their chosen character, showing how they change in attitude towards others or react to changing circumstances.

The number of teachers addressing written comments to students has decreased significantly this year and most centres sent administration and inclusion of the Optem lists had improved.

One thing that would be helpful to the moderation team would be when the samples are assembled ready for posting, if centres could put them in order highest to lowest or vice versa. That would really help the sub sample selection.

Summary of concerns:

- AO4 was poorly addressed for a number of centres – focus is still on AO2
- Not meeting the deadline for submission
- Failing to include the highest and lowest marked scripts
- Entering marks incorrectly – mark on the front sheet did not always tally with the Gateway entry
- Failing to substitute scripts
- Incorrectly completing the front sheets – missing names, numbers, marks etc.
- Not writing annotations which reflect the AOs – although this has significantly improved this year
- Not writing a summative comment related to the AOs
- Lack of internal moderation
- Not annotating the scripts aiming their comments to the moderator rather than the student

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

