Principal Moderator's Report
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GCSE English 5EH03 01

Creative English

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# General overview

It was pleasing to note that candidates across the full range of ability coped well with the demands of the assessment criteria in this series. The vast majority of candidates had clearly been well prepared by centres for this component and they engaged fully with the themes, tasks and texts provided.

Overall, most centres accurately applied standards for the various components of this unit. Internal standardisation remains a vital part of the process which centres need to undertake, even when relatively small cohorts are involved. Attendance at regional standardising meetings by a representative of the English department, preferably the teacher with responsibility for GCSE/KS4, or participation in online training provided by Edexcel is important in supporting the internal standardising process. This has always been and remains the reason that Awarding Bodies strongly recommend that time is set aside to ensure robust internal standardisation procedures are in place.

# Speaking and listening tasks

It is clear that during the moderation visits that have been undertaken by Edexcel, centres have, on the whole, applied the assessment criteria accurately when marking the activities observed. In the majority of centres, the Edexcel exemplification DVD has been used to ensure that the assessments of all teachers within a department are standardised. It has also been pleasing to see that the exemplification DVD has been used with candidates as a teaching and learning resource to indicate to candidates the skills required to achieve a particular band.

Centres are reminded that the only tangible 'evidence' available when moderating the speaking and listening activities during the visit to centres are the contemporaneous notes kept by teachers at the point of assessment. Although moderators reported some very good practice in this regard, there was also a concern that in some centres these notes were lacking in detail. It is vital that centres ensure that the record keeping by teachers evidences the judgements made about candidates.

The teacher responsible for speaking and listening within the department must ensure that:

- a robust internal standardising has taken place to guarantee that all teachers are applying accurate standards
- there is sufficient detail in the notes being kept by teachers to justify the marks awarded.

It should also be noted by centres that the updated cover sheet used for this series asked centres to explain any differences in the marks awarded for the speaking and listening controlled assessment tasks and the written controlled assessment tasks. Centres are expected to provide some detail in the explanation for these differences.

# Poetry (Reading)

Most centres interpreted and applied the marking criteria accurately and consistently. At the top of Band 5, there were a number of candidates who produced detailed and original pieces of poetry analysis. However, there were some issues in the application of marks around the band boundaries, specifically between Bands 3, 4 and 5. Band 3 responses are **'sound'** – they explain how the writer has used techniques to create effect, and support these points with specific examples. Band 4 responses are **'thorough'** – understanding is more developed and the response is sustained and consistent. For Band 5, candidates need to demonstrate **'perceptive'** understanding across all three poems with well selected and discriminating use of evidence. In some cases, centres identified explanations which were 'sound' as 'thorough', despite a lack of development and sustained support. Meanwhile, some responses worked through all three poems but were constrained by rigid adherence to the 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' structure, meaning that they were too pedestrian to be 'perceptive'.

Unlike Unit 1, there is no requirement for comparison in this unit. The key skills are engaging with the meaning of the poems and showing an understanding of the poets' choices of language and technique. Some candidates tended to list the literary techniques employed, spotting examples of metaphors, alliteration and rhyme schemes but not commenting on how or why these devices were used, or on the effects created. The more successful responses, however, showed candidates engaging maturely and carefully with a range of different poems and often adding a personal comment about how the poem made them think and feel, and demonstrating impressive understanding of how language was manipulated for effect. This was particularly evident in responses to the 'Taking a Stand' cluster.

This series marked the first use of the new tasks for poetry. Although all of the themes were covered, 'Taking a Stand' was particularly popular. A significant number of candidates responded to 'Clashes and Collisions' and 'Relationships', with a small minority of centres choosing 'Somewhere, Anywhere'. There was limited evidence of differentiation in the choice of poems from the Anthology, and in many centres all candidates responded to the same three poems. Choice of poems and even of clusters can be an excellent tool in allowing candidates of different abilities to produce their best work, and some centres used this to good effect, with different groups responding to different clusters. Once again, it needs to be emphasised that the set poem is not intended to be 'unseen' at the point of assessment – candidates can prepare on this poem in exactly the same way as they do for the Anthology poems.

For Taking a Stand, 'I Shall Paint My Nails Red', 'Remember' and 'No Problem' were most frequently used, whereas for Clashes and Collisions, 'Catrin', 'Cousin Kate' and 'Hitcher' were popular, as were 'Valentine' and 'Our Love Now' for Relationships. The set poems presented some challenges to candidates, particularly 'Family Affairs'. However, most candidates were able to demonstrate that they had engaged with the meaning and language of the poems, and supported their points with textual references.

There is still significant evidence that the use of literary terms can become a straitjacket rather than a supportive framework, leading to a tendency to 'feature spot'. In several cases, candidates seemed to be determined to comment on the 'octet and sestet' in 'Remember', without ever really engaging with how this structural device contributed to the meaning of the poem. Once again, it should be stressed that while the use of 'Point, Evidence, Explanation' is helpful in allowing candidates to structure their writing, for candidates working towards Band 5, there is a need to

show perceptive and discriminating analysis, and for this purpose a fully conceptualised response is necessary, rather than a more mechanical process.

There was some evidence of centres beginning to use multi-modal responses to poetry in this series, often in the form of a PowerPoint or Movie Maker presentation with accompanying notes.

# Creative writing

The application of the marking criteria for the writing task was mainly accurate. Once again, the main issues came from responses which were poorly planned and structured, and often simply too long. The assessment criteria for AO3 (i and ii) were applied consistently in most cases at Bands 1 and 2. Marks at the boundaries between Bands 3, 4 and 5 were less secure. The main issue in this area was control. Band 3 specifies 'some evidence of crafting in the construction of sentences' and 'controlled paragraphing', whereas Band 4 specifies 'variety in the construction of sentences' and 'secure organisation'. At times, responses with little control of sentence structure or paragraphing were placed in Band 4 because some of the vocabulary choices were apt and effective. In such cases, centres need to consider the balance between all of the bullet points in the mark scheme. Band 5 responses are typically 'convincing', 'sophisticated' and 'compelling'.

Assessment criteria for AO3(iii) were applied consistently in most cases, although with some leniency at the top of the range and harshness towards to bottom of the range. For 6 or 7 marks there should be clear evidence of using punctuation devices with precision and sophistication **for deliberate effect**. Whilst assessment of spelling was mainly consistent, assessment of punctuation was not. Again, a useful reference point for punctuation is the accurate use of commas – it was still possible to find responses with extensive comma splicing being awarded marks in Band 4, where 'precision' and 'control' are specified.

This is always an interesting task to moderate and once again candidates produced a range of thought-provoking responses. Candidates do not have to use the same theme for the poetry and the creative writing task, and so here 'Clashes and Collisions' and 'Relationships' were the most popular choices.

'Ghosts of War' elicited a range of very good responses, often written in the first person as a soldier looking back at his experience in the trenches. Once again, one of the key factors in success seemed to be the scope of the response – one day was usually described much more successfully than one year, or even, in some cases, the entire war. Diary entries were a popular mode, which led some candidates to forget paragraphing. The most successful responses showed evidence of careful planning and structure, with endings that reflected their beginning, for example, or carefully controlled use of sentence structures for effect.

'Looking Back' was also a popular choice. Candidates who focused on developing character and voice did better here, rather than those who paid the most attention to plot twists and turns. Although a relatively small number of centres responded to 'Taking a Stand', candidates produced some impressive work on this theme – most notably from one centre where candidates wrote internal monologues from the point of view of one of the protestors, allowing them to explore immediate feelings and reactions alongside underlying convictions and fears.

Two points to remember: firstly, candidates do better when they 'show' how characters are reacting and responding, rather than explicitly 'telling' the reader how they feel. Secondly, the creative writing response does not need to meet the 1,000 word limit – in fact, some of the more successful pieces were closer to half that

length, but showed evidence of careful crafting by candidates, whereas some of the longer responses struggled to sustain their momentum.

# Administration

New cover sheets: the main difference between the new cover sheet and the previous version is the inclusion of a section in which centres are asked to explain any significant discrepancy between speaking and listening and reading and writing marks. Centres need to consider carefully how such discrepancies have arisen, and the comments entered in this section should be specific to individual candidates rather than a 'blanket' statement about centre procedures for addressing speaking and listening.

Edexcel Online: entry marks for Edexcel Online have now been split into two sections for this unit. Reading and writing marks must be entered under 1A, whereas speaking and listening is entered under 1B. Include the top and bottom marked candidates with the sample when work is sent to the moderator.

Annotation: centres will be aware that there are key words used in the band descriptors. It is helpful if these are referenced in the annotation, but important that they are used accurately, and that the words used in annotation match the centre mark awarded, e.g. 'thorough explanation' on a piece with a mark of 17 in Band 4 for poetry.

Treasury tags: please use treasury tags, as individual work which is either sent as a series of loose-leaf pages or contained inside plastic wallets can easily become separated during moderation.

Marks: remember to total up the marks for all components before entering them on the system.

# Paper summary

Based on their performance on this paper, candidates are offered the following advice.

## For poetry

- There is no specific requirement to compare the poems in this unit. Comparison is assessed in Unit 1: English Today.

- The response should show that the candidate has engaged with the meaning of the poems and has explored how meaning has been created.

- Points should be supported with carefully chosen evidence from the poems.

## For creative writing

- Responses should have a clear sense of audience and purpose.

- Responses should show control and manipulation of sentence structures for effect, and a wide range of vocabulary choices.

- Responses are marked for content **and** accuracy – careful proof reading can pick up errors and improve marks.