Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel International GCSE
In English Language (4EA1) Paper 03

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Introduction:

Overall the moderating team felt that the unit had been very successful and that the vast majority of centres had embraced the new requirements with professionalism and diligence.

Administration:

In terms of administration, most centres had submitted folders with the requisite cover sheets and information in place and with folders neatly secured and treasury tagged. However, some centres did omit to send the EDI printout along with their folders. This is the printout of the whole centre entry for the component, along with the marks that have been entered online. We ask for this sheet so that the moderator can check, immediately upon opening the packet, that the required sample has been sent and that the marks correspond between the online input and the folders. The moderator can then check against the sheet that the folder with the highest and lowest mark has also been included with the sample. A number of moderators noted that highest and lowest mark folders had not always been included and this is something for all centres to be aware of, as it is often time consuming and inconvenient for departments if folders have to be sent at a later date.

Cover sheets were, on the whole, appropriately completed. We do ask that the subtotals for the Reading work (essay + commentary) and Writing work (AO4 + AO5) are recorded clearly and separately before providing an overall total. Supporting comments for those marks should be completed, again so that the moderator can see at a glance the centre's final decision making, rather than 'see inside'. Thank you to those centres who secured their folders with treasury tags, making them safe and easy to handle for the team. Loose sheets in plastic wallets are insecure and unhelpful, as are folders presented in cardboard folders or heavily stapled.

It is a good idea to ensure a second pair of eyes double checks that the marks on the cover sheet correspond to those entered online. Moderating colleagues did discover errors at times in inputted marks just in those folders sent for sample. We are able to rectify those to ensure your candidates are not disadvantaged or unfairly credited but, of course, can only see those within the sample. Though only a small percentage of errors were found, it is well worth centres double checking this before marks are submitted rather than trying to rectify this post results.

Almost every centre submitted work promptly however and this helped the process run smoothly and to time.

Task Setting:

Assignment A:
Many centres set wide and varied reading tasks for their candidates. In larger centres, it was noted by the team that where there was a variety of texts used and tasks set in order to differentiate effectively, candidates were more enabled than where one task was set for all. Additionally, it was pleasing to see a number of centres where candidates had selected their own pairings of texts to

work with, though it should be noted that task setting here needs to be carefully monitored.

I do want to take this opportunity, in the first report of the new specification, to address an issue that every moderator encountered. This was the issue of 'comparison'. Whilst the specification invites responses to any two texts from the anthology, the work on these two texts should be addressing the following assessment objectives:

- AO1: read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives.
- AO2: understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects.

Essentially here, AO1 is looking for a demonstration of the 'what' – the comprehension skill demonstrated by the candidate and AO2 is looking for a demonstration of the 'how' – the analytical skill of the candidate and their ability to comment on the effect of writers' choices. Though assignments are marked holistically, centres should note the weighting of those marks in the essay as 6 and 18 respectively.

There are no marks for comparison in this assignment. Whilst many candidates – particularly the most able – will draw parallels and make interesting and indeed perceptive connections between their chosen texts, centres who set comparative tasks at times actively disadvantaged less secure candidates. On numerous occasions, the moderators discovered weaker candidates submitting the title 'Poetry Comparison' or similar and then making little more than simple links between the texts in terms of content and theme. This precluded them from achieving marks for AO2 in anything but the simplest form, whereas writing about the texts concurrently and in more detail would have been more enabling. At times, more worryingly, much more able candidates had been set a comparison task, the response to which, despite being well expressed and interesting in terms of its interpretations, marginalised or even completely ignored AO2. These responses were often given very high marks initially by the centre, but were clearly not meeting the requirements of the specification.

It can be useful to include phrasing which includes reference to both AOs in the task such as:
How do (writer's names) use language and structure to present ideas about (topic or theme)?

Whilst the most able candidates can take more abstract ideas and work with them in a highly perceptive way, at times rather difficult tasks were set for middle range and less able candidates. It was very rare to see centres offering bullet points within their task setting to scaffold weaker candidate responses. *'Explore any two texts that deal with loss.'* can be freeing for an able candidate, but for others an approach, such as the following, could be helpful:
Both 'Disabled' and 'Out, Out' deal with ideas about loss. Explore:
- *the different kinds of loss in each poem*
- *the kinds of words, phrases and language features used to describe what is lost*
- *the way each poem is structured or shaped to reveal each loss*
- *how you are affected by the writers' ideas and choices.*

A further issue that was noted by the team was the rather clumsy use of contextual and biographical information. This has been raised in many previous reports. An opening Wikipedia style introduction about the life of Robert Frost or Maya Angelou does not add any marks to an assignment. They do not represent good practice in terms of critical style and should really be discarded at drafting stage. As a rule of thumb, if your candidates are answering an effectively set question properly then they *will* incorporate context by default and with subtlety.

Commentaries:

As a new departure, we saw many approaches to commentary writing. Those centres who submitted pieces of approximately 300 words, clearly and separately labelled away from the main essay, with interesting explanations of the choice of text against the backdrop of the rest of the texts in the anthology were the most successful. Less successful were the ones who used the commentary as an introduction or conclusion to the main essay as it was not possible to see where the marks were awarded or how they were separate from the main essay mark. Some candidates wrote almost another essay for the commentary and used it to continue their exploration – this is not appropriate. Others packed their commentary full of ideas about language and structure where this was, at times, missing from the main essay. Again, this was inappropriate as there are no AO2 marks for the commentary, just AO1.

For more help on commentaries:
https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/International%20GCSE/Engl ish%20Language%20A/2016/Teaching%20and%20learning%20materials/Comm entary-Writing-Support-Pack-and-Exemplars.zip

Assignment B: was, on the whole, tackled really well by the vast majority of centres and candidates. Work was much more varied in terms of tasks set or attempted. At times, work was of an extremely high quality and often superseded the quality of the reading work in the folder, especially where reading work was heavily reliant on notes or teacher input. The writing was freer, often very original, imaginative and accurate. The vast majority of candidates had submitted narrative work. Some of this work was linked thematically to the Anthology texts, which added breadth to the folder, others to Literature texts such as *Macbeth* and *Lord of the Flies*. We saw fairy tales used as stimulus, where narrative outcomes had a gothic twist; the opening line of *Mrs Dalloway* was used as a starting point and 'The Last Time I Saw You ….' as an opening. These were effective as they allowed candidates to develop their own narratives in varied and interesting ways. There were some successful examples of 'hard boiled' thriller type narratives, though at times some of these became a little disturbing and perhaps not ideally suited for audience. Occasionally, a recognisable film plot emerged, and this is perhaps something for centres to guard against.
Personal and descriptive writing was rare to find, though when we did find it, it was often extremely successful. There were accounts of swapping schools, leaving friends, starting again, which had perhaps been inspired by the themes of some of the anthology texts and were very sensitive and moving. Journalistic pieces and examples of travel writing were also rare but extremely effective and often the work of a more able candidate, who had made a personal choice to

write in this genre. We saw mixed results from what could be termed 'recycled Controlled Assessment tasks' however.

Assessment, annotation and internal moderation:

Most centres had worked diligently to apply the mark scheme accurately and consistently. As colleagues, we all appreciate how time-consuming marking and assessment can be, but those centres who had applied the guidelines and mark scheme consistently and fairly are to be thanked for their work. Your efforts were both noticeable and appreciated by the whole moderating team. You help to reinforce the standard we have set and provide effective benchmarks right through the moderating process.

Where centres were not entirely on point, the team saw, predictably, far more leniency than severity and this really needs to be guarded against. This was usually marginal, however, it was most commonly and obviously seen and noted around the boundaries for L3/4 or L4/5 where marks were awarded at the top of the level when not all of the level descriptors had been securely evidenced. This was often the case where there was a shortfall in AO2 skill due to task setting. Centres should be absolutely sure they have all of the skills for a level before awarding all of the marks within it - there are five separate marks and five clearly defined skills in each level. The awarding of these marks should then also be supported by accurate annotation of the skills seen. Annotation, sadly, does not have a magical effect and no amount of writing 'sound understanding' and 'clear understanding' in a margin can transform a muddle!

A guideline document for the new specification providing exemplar marked reading assignments along with an explanation of the marks awarded can be found on the website: https://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/International%20GCSE/Engl ish%20Language%20A/2016/Teaching%20and%20learning%20materials/4EA1_ 03_Coursework_Exemplars_Pack;Pre-First-Assessment.zip

Where there was severity in applying the marks, this was more common in Assignment B, and often in terms of the AO5 mark. At times, slight severity in marking Assignment B occurred where a candidate's skills had not been annotated and noted. This could, at times, disadvantage some of the weaker candidates, where there was a sense that the candidate and not the piece of work was being marked. This could be the case if the centre had a large number of more able candidates.

Assessment and internal moderation practices were extremely varied and at times, a real concern for the team. Some centres had annotated their work very thoroughly with a first marker, then annotated again with a second and come to a consensus. These centres were, without a shadow of a doubt, our most secure. Others had a first marker, with a second marker dating or initialling the mark and writing 'Agreed'. Whilst this was evidence of a kind of moderation process taking place, there could still be a real lack of precision or fine-tuning of the marks as a result.

Where problems occurred with a centre's marks, there was likely to be a lack of discerning or helpful annotation by a first marker, random and indeed pointless

ticking, applying comments that did not relate to the mark scheme and little or no evidence of internal moderation. There were numerous pieces of work where work was being corrected in terms of spelling and grammar – this is really unhelpful as it masks the candidate's own work and skill. Comments to the candidate are also redundant – the piece of work submitted to the moderator is no longer a draft and all annotation should be there to provide evidence for the moderator. At other times, and thankfully rarely, whole pages and whole assignments were seen to be left totally blank with just a number at the end. This is clearly unacceptable. As a result, some of these centres had a distinctly different rank order to the one achieved by the moderator, which meant the centre potentially left their candidates either disadvantaged or unfairly favoured, neither of which is acceptable. Thankfully these were in the minority, but nevertheless they exist, and some centres clearly need to refer back to the guidance and support documents provided.

A key reminder would be that the annotation you provide is to illustrate to the moderator your application of the mark scheme, your internal moderation process and your final judgement of the candidate's marks. That annotation, along with the summative comments of both the first and second marker, where applicable, should appear on a final clean copy of each candidate's submission. Thank you to those centres who follow this procedure with all due diligence and made the summer series a pleasure to moderate.