

LANGUAGE & LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/11 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Candidates need to allocate a set amount of time to: identify factors for writing; plan to write; write; check; correct.
- Candidates should adhere to the guidance of writing no more than 400 words for their responses to **Question 1a**. They should avoid lengthy preambles before addressing the actual task. Candidates should also adhere to the rubric of writing a minimum of 600 words for their **Section B** response.
- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they answer. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a *diary entry*, focusing on both *the importance of your help* and *the impact of your actions*.
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed form and audience as well as the most appropriate voice or persona to adopt, the mood and tone that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable structure to employ.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English with accurate sentence demarcation. Often, responses were weaker due to a loss of grammatical control in attempts to write in long, complex sentences. These candidates would do better to aim for clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety. Two errors that occurred quite regularly were those of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops and of writing in sentence fragments, rather than in complete sentences
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully.
- 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 some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)** at all.

Stronger responses to **Question 1(a)** focused clearly on the question, writing engaging speeches aimed at other candidates in the school. Weaker responses consisted of simple speeches, without consideration of the specified audience.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who were able to maintain a close focus on their 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 were focused entirely on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis; this was usually indirectly, by outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some **Question 2** reviews were simple recounts of the city tour and the specific sights, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion about the tour; some responses to **Question 3** were purely narrative in form rather than descriptive; some **Question 4** responses 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 reasons.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You recently joined an after-school club, which is now looking for more new members. You have offered to give a short speech to your year group, persuading people to join.

- (a) **Write the text for your speech, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the importance of developing skills and interests, and create a sense of enthusiasm for this club.**

Most candidates wrote an introduction which included a greeting to their audience of peers and a brief outline of the purpose of their speech. The majority of the responses were written in informal register and there was some use of teen language, such as 'y'all', 'c'mon guys', 'geeks' and 'nerds'. Many responses created a sense of enthusiasm by using exclamation marks and mentioning additional features of the club, like free pizza snacks on meeting days and occasional field trips.

Many stronger responses included engaging openings to the speeches, often by using a rhetorical question rather than a pedestrian welcome explaining the purpose of the speech. One example of this is in this speech opening encouraging students to join the school chess club: 'Have you ever wanted to engage in a battle of wits? Have you ever wanted to test your skill and dedication against others?'

Stronger responses gave specific names of clubs and focused on the objectives of the activities promoted and the skills developed as a result of membership, as well as their importance to the students' future. One strong example of this was: 'An officer of this club coached youth soccer for the entirety of his four years. Now, he has made it to the US National team! Think about that; one of our very own made his career based on a small coaching gig!'

Some stronger responses achieved a sense of purpose and audience successfully by demonstrating how the club would benefit fellow students. In one such example, the candidate showed in one complex sentence how the club would be beneficial, using a range of well-chosen vocabulary: 'Recognized and endorsed by the National Honors Society, we have worked together to provide new members with the experience to socialize and make new friends, assist the beachside community and marine life organisations and contribute to the development of critical skills to allow candidates to properly sprout into adulthood through character, integrity and good Samaritanism'.

Many responses were weaker where they were needing in terms of structure, very often being written without any paragraph breaks. Many of these weaker responses were short, often under 200 words. Some weaker responses focused too much on areas like the activities conducted by the club or how the club benefitted students in a general manner, without providing specific details. Some weaker responses concentrated on trying to convince the audience to join, but without elaborating on concrete reasons to persuade them. In many weaker responses, candidates did not specify the nature of the club being promoted. Some responses focused too much on the speaker's own narrative of personal experiences as a club member, which detracted from task achievement.

Weaker responses were often hampered by grammatical errors, for example using commas instead of full stops between sentences. For example, in this response, the range of language was limited, and errors were frequent: 'Making a game is not easy and it takes everything a game developer knows to make a game, you cant make a game that interest people if even you are not interest in it.'

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

Stronger responses were analytical and detailed, covering aspects of structural choice in addition to language and form. The best responses assimilated terminology fluently and illustrated points in detail, with apposite quotation. There were some strong evaluations of the conventions and ingredients of the speech format.

Stronger responses discussed the usage of features such as hypophora and asyndeton confidently. Success was often achieved through multiple short paragraphs naming the techniques one by one, giving evidence from their shorter writing, and explaining the effect on the audience. There were some examples of good practice in terms of succinct, precise quotation to support analysis, for example: 'Although mostly formal diction is used, I have also peppered the speech with colloquial language. Examples include "busy bunch" to describe the students, and "sizzling" and "cool" to describe some of the food at the parties. Colloquial language is more relatable to the student audience, keeping them more engaged and interested.'

Many weaker responses did not identify the linguistic and structural choices made in the shorter writing, or use appropriate linguistic terminology, as in this example: 'My speech was effective because of the language I used.' Others made little attempt to analyse the effect of linguistic choices, simply commenting, 'I used adjectives, similes and metaphor,' and, 'My rhetorical question will make people think.'

Many weaker responses included basic general commentary on the content of the speech with no relevant language or structural points being made. They were often in need of reference to specific words or phrases from the speech and tended to focus on simple identification of features with little or no analysis of their effect or the ways in which they relate to audience and shape meaning. Some responses were extremely short, with linguistic features incorrectly identified. The weakest responses simply described or paraphrased the speech.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

During a recent holiday, you went on a half-day guided tour of a city. Write a review of the guided tour, which will be published on an international travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Half-day guided tours of New York City, Paris, London, Rio de Janeiro and other major cities were the most common topics. Most candidates discussed various aspects of the tour and then gave a recommendation as to whether the tour was good value for money, sometimes qualifying their opinion by saying who might or might not enjoy the tour.

Some candidates were highly adept at this particular genre of writing, employing a range of stylistic conventions in order to create a sophisticated response. Stronger responses maintained an authoritative persona throughout of a bored/enthusiastic/disappointed tourist, which made the review feel authentic. Stronger responses consisted of credible, balanced reviews; many named the tour, using titles such as, 'Viva Miami' and 'Key West half-day City Tour.' They considered a wide range of aspects of the event, including a range of tourist attractions and activities, amenities provided during the tour, customer service, food options and value for money.

Many stronger responses were structured with subheadings defining the places or activities included on the tour of the chosen place. This resulted in coherent, clearly structured pieces of writing. Focus on specific spots of the city in each paragraph enabled candidates to describe the place, comment on the experience, and evaluate the service of the tour (as well as the tour guide) in an organised manner. A recommendation and star rating were often included, with the justification for the rating, as in this example: 'Booking this guided tour was truly one of the best decisions I think I have ever made. The tour was very well organised,

with a competent, knowledgeable guide, clear itinerary, interesting stops. My brain felt as though it would burst after all the information I absorbed, but in the best way possible.'

Most stronger reviews were concluded well, ending with a sentence or paragraph that gave further credibility to the review and the persona that had been adopted, as in this example: 'Overall, the tour did what it needed to do. We got around the town, we learned about history and my family were kept busy. However, the execution of the tour took it down to two and a half stars.'

Weaker reviews mainly focused on describing the place (which in some cases was not a city), food and activities without expressing personal views and evaluation of the guided tour itself. A list-like approach to the sites visited during the city tour contributed to some responses not reaching the minimum number of words required. Many responses lost focus on the task by describing preparations for the tour, or the flight to the destination. This compromised fulfilling the purpose of writing a review. Many weaker responses were written from first person point of view and often lapsed into narrative, recounting the events leading up to the guided tour. For example: 'I woke to see the sun rising through the cotton curtains,' and, 'my sister was playing with her toys while we got dressed. I wore jeans and trainers.' Sometimes these responses were more akin to a personal diary entry than an unbiased assessment for publication on a website.

Question 3 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece about a waterfall. In your writing, create a sense of atmosphere, and focus on sound, light and movement to help your reader to imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

A significant number of candidates successfully used the technique of a framed narrative, such as walking in a forest and coming across a waterfall. For many candidates, the narrative details became the most significant feature of the response, so that the ideas related to the descriptive purpose of the task were only developed in a limited manner.

Stronger responses were those where candidates kept to the descriptive stance throughout the piece, describing sound, light and movement with subtlety and precision. Some candidates described the waterfall at different times, for example in the morning, in the afternoon and before sunset, observing the changes that had taken place. Stronger responses invariably established the descriptive form in the very first paragraph or sentence, for example: 'As I crossed the weak, wobbly wooden bridge, I looked up at the diamond-coloured waterfall, gleaming and glistening.' Stronger pieces sometimes presented elements of nature in a creative manner that made the descriptive piece both interesting to read and vividly imaginable. An example of this was one candidate's attempt to personify a water droplet: 'Tom was an average water droplet ... In his river, Tom lived a simple yet enjoyable life ... Tom darted forward through his river. Up, down, left, right. Each of the other droplets jostled around violently, each with his own thoughts of victory ... The river continued its motion towards an unknown destination.'

Stronger responses included a variety of linguistic techniques, for example metaphorical language, as in the following example: 'A sound as soft as wind chimes floated through the air like a dandelion, whispering magical music into my ears. As I followed the sound, it increased in volume, like the finale of a symphony, finally reaching a grand crescendo when I arrived at the origin of this whimsical music.'

Weaker responses were sometimes planned poorly, resulting in most of the piece being about what preceded getting to the waterfall and ending with the speaker leaving at the end of the day, with little descriptive detail. For example, this opening: 'I got up as usual, looking forward to the day ahead; my mother made me my usual breakfast of cereal and fruit.' Weaker descriptive pieces were generally limited to use of adjectives to describe the waterfall and its surroundings, and some of the weaker responses tended towards frequent sentence fragments using present participles such as: 'The burning sun shining over the water leaving a glossy top layer. The sound of the water splashing against each other. The warm mist in the air clouding over the clear blue sky.'

Question 4 – Letter

You have read a newspaper article which said that studying the arts at university is a waste of time, and that teenagers should be encouraged to take courses that lead directly to a particular job. You disagree and decide to write a letter to the editor of the newspaper about this. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Stronger responses demonstrated good use of planning and gave different points of view for the argument, supported by explanations and clear examples in each of the body paragraphs. Many stronger responses consistently referred to the greater advantages of an arts course by raising points like: ‘students placed in a creative environment freely express their ideas without the interference of a job’s guidelines or a course’s limitations. They can allow their imagination to grow and bond as one, formulating entirely new worlds and ideas that would not exist without the contribution from one another.’ A strong conclusion usually included a request for a specific course of action from the editor to fix the undesirable content that had been published: ‘I acknowledge that there is free speech and that it was not necessarily wrong for your newspaper to publish that article, but I hope that you will consider publishing another that shows the other side of things.’

Some responses evinced clear and effective arguments, for example: ‘Encouraging teenagers to take courses that lead directly to a particular job will leave many without a job. Overpopulating certain courses will cause many to suffer, especially during times like these, where uncertainty haunts the modern world. Unemployment rates are increasing day by day, while Artificial Intelligence has become prominent, eradicating many professions. Encouraging naive teenagers into certain courses that they are not comfortable in is truly a recipe for disaster.’

Candidates who developed convincing arguments often employed anecdotes, either from personal experience or reference to well-known entrepreneurs/celebrities: ‘Individuals can become innovative. An example of this is Tim Burton, whose childhood creativity followed him into adult life.’ Some responses referred to specific aspects of the original newspaper article, such as the imagined headline: ‘I recently read your article, Art is a Hobby, Not a Lifestyle.’ This enabled a sense of engagement and authenticity, as did quoting statements from the article in order to build counter arguments.

Weaker responses were characterised by generalised content which centred around the positives of studying an arts course but did not explore the benefits in much depth. Many responses would have been more successful with improvements in: clear punctuation, clear organisation, and signposting in arguments. Weaker letters often engaged in repetitive justification of art as a form of expression for young people. Some did not address the key point of the prompt about taking courses that lead directly to a particular job and confined themselves to the value of art in general.

LANGUAGE & LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/12 Writing

Key messages

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- Candidates should look at the key instructions in the questions they answer. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a *diary entry*, focusing on both *the importance of your help* and the *impact of your actions*.
- Candidates should consider the following as part of the planning stage: the *purpose* of the piece, the prescribed form and audience as well as the most appropriate voice or persona to adopt, the mood and tone that they should try to create in their writing and the most suitable structure to employ.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation. Often, responses were weaker due to a loss of grammatical control in attempts to write in long, complex sentences. These candidates would do better to aim for clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety. Two errors that occurred quite regularly were those of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops and of writing in sentence fragments, rather than in complete sentences
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense.
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- 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 some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)** at all.

Stronger responses to **Question 1(a)** focused clearly on the question, with engaging diary entries. Weaker responses consisted of simple accounts of the event, needing more focus on the impact of the help given.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** were from candidates who were able to maintain a close focus on their 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. Many weaker responses focused entirely on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis; this was usually indirectly, by outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were in need of a sense of drama or suspense; some **Question 3** responses lost focus on the formality required of an essay and became repetitive, with the same points made several times rather than offering a selection of reasons; some **Question 4** reviews were simple recounts of a visit to the new sports centre, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion about it.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

When you were in the town centre recently, you were able to help someone you did not know, who was in a difficult situation. You decide to write about the experience in your diary.

- (a) **Write the text for your diary entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the importance of your help and the impact of your actions.**

Diary writing seemed to be a familiar form for most candidates and there were many engaging and successful responses. Many candidates used the date as an indication that they were writing a diary, and candidates created a range of situations, with the strongest responses creating thoughtful and convincing situations, many occurring in busy shopping centres.

Stronger responses included a considered opening with evidence of temporal adverbs as in, 'Yesterday, I was at the Meridan centre,' 'A few days ago,' 'When I was in town yesterday'. Openings such as these helped to validate the required form, alongside the conventional 'Dear Diary' opening. In the best responses, candidates addressed the audience, using references to shared knowledge, as well as abbreviations and colloquial language, and the strongest responses read like a private conversation with a best friend. For example: 'Dear Diary – It's me again. Yeah, I know. It's been a while, but I just wanted to record what happened today.'

Stronger responses had an element of suspense and a build up to the difficult situation, which seemed initially to be quite ordinary, as in this example: 'I was at Fresh City. Specifically, the line at the check-out was quite short: only a corporate worker in a pristine suit with some milk and a very skinny waif of a girl with a carton of strawberries. Skinny girl stepped up to pay but her change was short.' The situation was rescued by the diarist and the diary entry was suitably concluded with the strawberries referenced again: 'I was feeling extremely accomplished and hoped that things turned out for her and that she enjoyed the strawberries!'

Another feature of more effective responses to this task was the inclusion of well-thought through reflections on the incident, as in the following example: 'This morning, I was able to save the life of a girl. Reality hit me hard today. It sent shivers down my spine as I kept pondering about how different people's lives can be and how privileged mine is. If I had not turned around when she poked me, if I had not looked into her eyes, if only this time I did not go to the candle aisle, this girl would have probably died.'

Weaker responses often presented a straightforward narrative with little sense of a diary entry and took too long introducing the situation. Consequently, such responses struggled to evoke an appropriate sense of mood and were often characterised by simple lexical choices. For example: 'Today something terrible happened. I saw a man having a heart attack and I helped to call an ambulance. It was scary, and I did not know what to do.'

Many responses were weaker where they were needing in terms of structure, very often being written without any paragraph breaks. Many of these weaker diary entries were short, often under

200 words. Such responses needed more development in all aspects – detail, personal reflection and the impact of the actions taken.

Weaker responses were also often hampered by grammatical errors, for example using commas instead of full stops between sentences. Ideas were mostly relevant but often needed more development. For example, in this response, the range of language was limited, and errors were frequent: 'I saw that 20 years old man who was sitting down at the bench, he is looking like someone who needed a help, he said yes he needed a help.'

(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 candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. Many responses would have been improved with the inclusion of more detail by providing evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Stronger responses were analytical and detailed, covering aspects of structural choice in addition to language and form. The best responses assimilated terminology with fluency and illustrated points in detail and with apposite quotation. Strong evaluations foregrounded the conventions and ingredients of the diary format.

Stronger responses discussed the usage of features such as hypophora and asyndeton confidently. Success was often achieved through multiple short paragraphs naming the techniques one by one, giving evidence from their answer, and explaining the effect on the audience. There were some examples of good practice in terms of succinct, precise quotation to support analysis. For example: 'I have used emotive language like "crying ... tears ... pleading" to highlight the importance of my help and the lasting impact of my actions.'

Stronger responses successfully addressed features of conversational style and informality, where appropriate, with some candidates mentioning the first-person format and using a confiding tone, such as in this example: 'Following the conventions of diary writing, it begins with a salutation to the diary and the time of entry ... The diary is personified as a person ... The structure of the text also pertains to the conventions of a diary with short sentences used ... The mood is pensive and reflective. This is created with words such as "daunting," "anxieties", "hate" and "smiling".'

Many weaker responses did not identify the linguistic and structural choices made, or use appropriate linguistic terminology, as in this example: 'My writing was effective because of the words I chose.' Others did not attempt to analyse the effect of the linguistic choices they had made, only identifying some basic language and structural features and making simple comments, as in these two examples: 'I used adjectives, similes and metaphors,' and, 'With good amount of adjectives used and description given, the reader can picture the scene.'

Many weaker responses included basic general commentary on the content of the diary entry with no relevant language or structural points being made. Some responses were extremely short, with linguistic features incorrectly identified, and had little or no comment on structure.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Story

Write a story called *Who am I?* about a person who suddenly loses their memory. 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. Situations imagined included someone who had lost their memory as a psychological ploy aimed at forgetting hideous crimes they had committed in a 'previous' life, and a range of less original ideas including car crashes, various dystopian imprisonments, terrorism, identity fraud, hostages and unspecified surgical mishaps. There were some unexpected endings to entertain the reader and some narratives reminiscent of the Alfred Hitchcock genre of horror films. The story form was not always strictly adhered to, with some candidates opting for 'cliff hanger' endings.

Stronger responses often showed immediate engagement with the title and theme of memory loss, as seen in these three openings: 'I stumbled around like a blind man, vaguely seeing a pallid film of light coming in from a single small window high up on the wall'; 'This is the year 3000. Hundreds of years ago, people were selected to be frozen in time, farmers, politicians, beggars, businessmen. There was no prejudice, no bias, only a desire for an egalitarian future;' 'In the mirror I saw a face that looked like it had seen combat. I stared hard at the face. Whose face? I did not recognise it. I sat down, my body shaking.'

Stronger responses had a clear focus on suspense and tension, with a variety of scenarios, frequently examples where a person wakes up in hospital not knowing who they are or how they got there. There were some very convincing pieces of writing where candidates conveyed feelings of loss or disbelief. This section of writing conveys a mixture of confusion and humour: 'Towering people in white surgical coats crowded around me ... "He's awake." I blanked out again. "Do you remember me?" I heard. Mutely, I shook my head. I did not even know what I looked like, let alone what my "mother" looked like.'

More engaging and successful responses focused on feelings of confusion and in some cases panic as the protagonist tried to make sense of himself and the surroundings, as in this response where a man wakes up in a warehouse, not having any sense of how he got there: "The man looked himself up and down. He was in business attire, a badly torn shirt. Who am I? He thought. He reached into his pocket and found a note. "Leo." Is that my name?"

Some weaker responses consisted of overly complex plots which lost control or took place over years and so the structure became unclear, and many began with clichéd opening sentences such as, 'I woke up in hospital,' and then continued with the doctors telling the protagonist they had lost their memory. Less successful responses often established the amnesiac's situation but seemed less confident about developing or resolving it dramatically. Repeated ideas without development were another feature of weaker responses, for example: 'It was 4 years later and he still could not remember. I do not think he will ever remember.'

Question 3 – Essay

In class, you have been discussing whether it is better to study a wide range of subjects at school, or to specialise in a few subjects. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic. Write between 600 and 900 words.

A significant number of responses to this question were characterised by first-hand experiences of being overwhelmed by having to study a wide range of subjects as opposed to specialising in just a few. Successful candidates produced a balanced view and there were many convincing arguments in favour of a range of subjects for varied interest and scope for future careers. Equally, many candidates argued that a range of subjects led to stress and limited leisure time leading to poor mental health.

In stronger essays, candidates explored this issue well, often posing a question at the start of their argument, as in, 'In a modern world, should not we expect individuals to have a basic knowledge of all fields?' Some candidates focused on freedom of choice and the importance of a healthy mind: 'students need a life outside of school!' Other candidates referenced studies to bolster their arguments in more convincing responses: 'Children are 40 per cent less likely to suffer anxiety and depression if they take up fewer subjects as indicated by a study at the University of Chicago.' Other stronger responses showed immediate engagement with the task by using a title based on the question, as seen in the two following examples: 'Specialise or Diversify?'; 'School Curriculum: Time for Change'. Effective structure and development were characterised by the use of discursive markers, such as, 'On the other hand ... Conversely ... However.'

The best responses demonstrated an appropriate register and style, with a clear sense of audience. For example, one candidate wrote, 'Similarly, the benefits of well-rounded learners should not be understated. Almost all of the empirical evidence points to the fact that students exposed to more subjects are more developed critical thinkers and are highly employable. For example, I had a special dislike of the performing arts as a child.'

Weaker responses tended to be less discursive in style and many were in need of specific examples. Such essays were written in a conversational style which was lacking the necessary formality and sophistication; this resulted in the loss of the authority that the essay required. Although many candidates addressed both sides of the question, a clear verdict at the end was not always included. Many weaker responses would have been improved with clear, logically arranged paragraphs and discourse markers, to suit a discursive style essay. Some weaker essays talked mostly about personal experience and did not extrapolate a general understanding of the issue. Responses were sometimes short or unfinished, while in many other cases the

ideas needed more adequate development and elaboration; the absence of these led to repetition of key points and phrases and some failure to develop detail.

Question 4 – Review

You recently went to a new sports centre for the first time. Write a review of the sports centre, which will be published in your school magazine. 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 state-of-the-art facilities but also considered the high costs involved.

Stronger responses were stylish and authentic, adopting an upbeat magazine style of writing. Personal recommendations and a trial day enhanced the persuasive verve of some writing. Many candidates demonstrated full knowledge of what can be found in sports centres and wrote at length, as if they were giving the reader a guided tour of the facilities, using appropriate language to attract potential clients. One candidate opened their review in an engaging way by giving an assessment of the sport centre's facilities and architecture. They wrote, 'Being a person who has always been fond of watching, as well as playing, all types of sports, I must say that I was highly impressed by the conditions, offers and opportunities offered by this sports centre. According to globally famous architects, this building comes on the list of the top 10 well-built buildings. It is a tall, lean building – classy yet ancient, made with bricks imported from Russia and concrete from China.'

Some of the better responses established the form by the simple but effective use of a headline, as seen in this example: 'Killion Sports centre: Worth the Hype?' Effective engagement was subsequently established in the very first sentence: 'As a sports buff and self-proclaimed gym nut, I've been pretty excited to visit Killion Sports centre – a brand new facility on Wisteria Avenue.' Less common lexis and complex structures were used to give details of various new sports centres: 'The smooth, light brown hardwood basketball court coupled with the durable rims that are just as strong as the ones present in the NBA will surely appeal to every basketball player, whether a dominating dunker or a swift sharpshooter.'

Weaker responses tended to take the form of an extended account of visiting the sports centre, simply retelling what happened to the speaker from the moment they arrived. Weaker responses did not further connect and develop facilities and activities offered at the new sports centre to the reviewing purpose of the task. Many candidates created a list of selling points for the venue without then developing these points, such as in this example: 'Great equipment, low cost, early opening hours,' and, 'There are 2 Olympic size swimming pools, 3 indoor football courts, 5 badminton and tennis courts.' Such list-like responses did not generate any sense of enthusiasm for the new venture and this approach made for rather muted responses overall.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13
Writing

There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- 1 Candidates should have a sound basic knowledge and understanding of their chosen texts.
- 2 Candidates should plan their essays and reflect their decisions in their opening paragraphs.

General comments

There were responses seen at every level of the mark scheme to every text on the paper. The large majority of candidates showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts and some ability to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were some rubric errors in this session, with candidates either answering too many questions or answering two questions from the same section. It is important that candidates understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some candidates are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

- 1 In this session, there were a number of answers seen to passage questions in both the drama and the poetry sections where the candidates seemed to have little knowledge of the textual context or understanding of its significance to the wider text. At this level of assessment, it is fundamental to a successful answer that candidates will know their texts well and have some understanding of the basic elements of the text in its genre. Some essays, for example, were unsure who Larry was or what was Ann's relationship to him when considering the passage in **Question 1(b)**. In the poetry, some answers on the Browning passage, **5(b)**, seemed very unsure of the situation the author was describing, through the music, and there were similar uncertainties on just about every passage question. Inevitably without the necessary knowledge and understanding as foundations on which to build an interpretation, the essays were at best generalised and restricted and severely limited in their success.
- 2 Candidates should always spend some time in planning their response and deciding what material is relevant to their interpretation before beginning to write their essay. This planning might lead neatly to an opening paragraph in which the candidate addresses the key terms of the task and is able to set the direction of their essay in a controlled and focused way. Without such moments of preplanning and forethought, the opening of an essay can become too generalised and easily drift into contextual speculation from which it is sometimes difficult to regain the appropriate focus on the given task.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- (a) Weaker answers retold Chris's story, often showing detailed knowledge of the text, though some were unable to select relevant material on which to focus. At this level, better answers had some understanding of key moments when audience responses to Chris might develop. For example 'Chris is human and not a caricature of a morally superior being, he is stubborn and short-tempered,' as one essay described him. More competent essays started with Miller's presentation, exploring how Chris's 'complex series of insecurities is revealed', through his dialogue, 'as his understanding of the real situation grows,' as one suggested. Many saw him as a 'tragic hero, whose hamartia is his naivety,' as another suggested. Textual knowledge at this level was supported by understanding of Miller's concerns and the way the author uses Chris's role to develop them. Good answers developed such ideas by looking at dramatic methods closely, with good focus and how an 'audience response might be shaped,' : Miller's use of language, the increase and release of tension, dramatic action and 'Miller's ability to change the tone of a scene with apparently simple things, such as George drinking the juice,' as one candidate remarked. Where such answers were supported by appropriate context, often historical, and r reference to and quotation from the text, the answers did very well.
- (b) This was the most popular question on the paper with over half of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers very often did not know the dramatic context to this passage and were unsure of the cause of the evident tensions between Ann and the Kellers at this point in the play. Better answers at this level were able to discuss the nature of the relationships, with some candidates able to outline 'Ann's strange situation of being a fiancée to two brothers at the same time, so far as Kate is concerned,' as one stated. However some essays spent too long explaining the complexities of the situation, with a consequent lack of focus on the detail of the passage. Others tried to interpret the passage on a piecemeal basis, trying to explain what momentary events 'might show' often leading to contradictory interpretations. For example for one candidate, 'Ann is clearly like a member of the family and Joe and Kate want to look after,' and a little later, 'Kate obviously hates Ann now for even being there.' More competent essays often outlined the textual context relevantly, Chris's absence and the significance of the letter, for example, as a framework for explaining why Ann's relationship with the Kellers was changing dramatically at this point in the play. Other candidates explored and contrasted 'the inner turmoil in each of the characters at this point in the play,' as a way of structuring their responses, with many fully aware of 'the minefield of emotions that Ann is trying to pick her way through,' as one candidate put it. Good answers were focused on Miller's presentation throughout, often the contrasting dramatic language, 'where Ann to Kate is a "good girl" and then a liar,' as one essay suggested. Other answers noted the dramatic action, as the characters 'shifting attitudes and emotions are reflected in their movements on stage.' Ann's attempt to protect Joe from the truth about Larry was often well explored, with some noting how 'the larger than life joker at the start of the play is now a crushed, uncertain figure, as the two women argue over his sons,' as one essay put it. Where such arguments were supported by appropriate reference to the passage and appropriate context, the answers did well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was the most popular (a) question on the paper, with some 10 per cent of the entry choosing it. Nearly every candidate had some relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers narrated Hero and Beatrice's 'stories', often ignoring the key words 'attitudes to men'. Essays at this level often had clear knowledge, though limited understanding of the relevant concerns. Better answers at this level did find appropriate, basic contrasts between the two main female characters, as 'Hero is all subservience and obedience, whereas Beatrice is all aggression and defiance,' as one response suggested. More competent answers moved beyond the narrative, exploring, for example, how Shakespeare used their attitudes to develop characterisation and 'crucially create the conflict from which came Hero's near tragedy and Beatrice's comic reversal,' as one candidate put it. Other competent answers contrasted female attitudes more widely, including Margaret's 'more earthy views,' as well as 'considering what men think women's attitudes

are and their consequences, as Leonato admonishes Beatrice for her shrewishness,' as one candidate argued. Good answers consider 'Shakespeare's presentation' in detail, exploring the effects of language, such as Hero's self-abasement in the church scene and Beatrice's 'witty but cutting attacks on men in general and Benedick in particular,' as one said. Dramatic action, use of contrasts, as well as the verbal sparring were all analysed well at times, with some insightful comments on the dramatic effects created. Beatrice was often the main focus and 'the sharpness of her commentary and reluctance to yield even to the Prince, Don Pedro, are directly contrasted by Shakespeare to Hero's submissive acceptance of the very man who had betrayed her on her wedding day,' as one candidate put it. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text, and some awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

- (b) This was a popular choice on the paper, with nearly 20 per cent of the entry choosing it. Weaker answers often did not know the context and had uneven knowledge of the relationship between Borachio and Don John and their relationship to the rest of the characters. This inevitably limited the success of the answers. Better answers at this level were able to give a narrative summary of Don John's disaffection and of the proposed deceptions, with some, at times generalised, comments on what this revealed about the two characters. More competent answers recognised the significance of the passage to the play's plot and dramatic structure, with some arguing that Don John's 'malevolence was simply not credible,' as one candidate put it, while others noted that Borachio 'is the main schemer, with Don John acting like his rather dumb sidekick in asking so many questions.' More successful answers at this level started to explore Shakespeare's concerns, for example the hierarchy of the society, the fragility of a woman's reputation and 'the gullibility of Don Pedro's court that falls for such a simple deception,' as one essay noted. Good answers explored the language and dialogue in detail, noting the question-and-answer approach as 'a dramatic tool to ensure the audience understands that Hero is always innocent,' as one candidate remarked. Other answers explored the effects of Don John's diction and imagery of sickness and illness, both in 'how it reveals his true nature, but also casts a shadow over the comedy of the deceptions of Benedick and Beatrice.' Others noted that 'money is only mentioned near end so we can assume Borachio simply wanted to please his master by slandering an innocent woman,' as one put it. Very good answers were able to develop such analysis into considering the dramatic effects in detail, with appropriate supporting reference to the passage.

Question 3

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

This was not a popular choice of text, with a more or less even split between the two options.

- (a) Most answers were able to find some relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to focus on the religious characters, especially Jero. Least successful were answers which simply retold Jero's story and charted his successful rise in status and power. Better answers at this level recognised his role as a 'humble beach prophet who becomes the leader of the Salvation Army, through his manipulation of his followers,' as one essay suggested. Sounder answers explored Soyinka's presentation of the other prophets as well as Jero, noting 'how Soyinka shows their "unsuitability for any sort of religious office",' as one candidate put it. Answers which contrasted these characters in the context of the play's wider concerns often did better, with some developing arguments that encompassed not only the prophets, but also 'the gullibility and often self-centred desires of their followers'. Good answers considered Soyinka's methods of presentation: language, for example Jero's slip of calling the worshippers 'customers', the nature of the prophets' promises, the use of violence, especially towards women and how religion was shown 'in contrast to politics as even more corrupted and abusive,' as one essay argued. Very good answers considered the dramatic effects of these methods in detail, with some perceptive analysis of both language and action, especially in the context of where and when Soyinka was writing the play.
- (b) Weaker answers tended either to summarise the preceding events or to narrate Jero's story in detail, often with little reference to the passage. Better answers at this level saw how Soyinka 'deliberately makes Jero talk about things that seem improper in a prophet, such as money and lust,' as one essay suggested. More competent responses were able to explore Soyinka's concerns with some understanding, often showing awareness of the satirical tone of the presentation, with a few responses able to note some lighter more comic touches in the passage. Good answers analysed both the language and the action in detail – Jero's search for an appropriate title, his sense of his own dignity and pride in his superiority and his acknowledgement

of his weaknesses were all discussed and seen as key elements in Soyinka's dramatic approach. Very good answers considered the dramatic effects of Soyinka's choices, with some suggesting that an 'audience might be appalled at this words and actions, yet at the same time find him quite appealing,' exploring perceptively the importance of this dramatic monologue to the plays' development and structure.

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

This was the least popular text on the paper with very few responses on either option.

- (a) Most answers were able to select relevant material, with which to address the question. Weaker answers offered narrative summaries, usually of the relationship between De Flores and Beatrice, often showing sound knowledge of the text and, in the more accomplished essays at this level, some understanding of the nature of the crimes and the appropriateness of the punishments. Better answers ranged more widely in the text, with some, for example, suggesting that Vermandero 'is also guilty in the way he tries to force his daughter into accepting a husband she doesn't want and ends up with the punishment of losing his daughter,' as one candidate suggested. Competent answers considered the presentation of crime – some arguing that 'De Flores and Beatrice are caught in an all-consuming passion that destroys them and those around them,' though others were less sympathetic seeing them as 'fundamentally selfish and for the sake of their desires, willing to commit anything, including murder,' as one essay argued. Good answers supported such arguments with analysis of the language, 'often sexual and or commercial as they trick each other into destruction,' as one candidate put it. Other good answers considered the actions, such as the murders of Piraquo and Diaphanta, and how the 'dramatist ensures that we see the pitiless way they are perpetrated, so that in the end the villains get no sympathy.' Where analysis was supported by close reference to the text and some awareness of contexts the answers often did very well.
- (b) Weaker answers retold the story of the relationship throughout the play, often with clear knowledge of the text and in more successful answers some understanding of 'how it develops from the antagonism and obsession revealed in the extract,' as one stated. Better answers looked more closely at the passage itself, often noting the 'threatening language and ominous imagery,' with some sound answers exploring the effect of the 'asides' on how the audience might respond. Good answers developed such arguments into considering the action and the interplay between the characters as well, often analysing the effects with some insight. Beatrice's 'this ominous ill-faced fellow,' was often discussed in detail, with good understanding of how she 'sets up the development of the relationship.' De Flores obsessional language was also well explored, with some seeing him 'as helpless in his lust, provoked by her harsh words into desperation and ultimately ready to commit murder to win her,' as one essay put it. Where such points were developed by close reference to the text and some contextual awareness, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

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

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems to discuss, though weaker answers were sometimes uneven in their knowledge of the text. More successful answers at this level were able to provide a summary of their chosen poems, with some understanding of the different human relationships presented. Where contrasting poems were chosen, for example *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister* and *A Light Woman*, candidates were able to address the 'in what ways' of the question with confidence, often leading easily into a consideration of some of Browning's poetic methods. Other popular and successful choices were *Porphyria's Lover* and *My Last Duchess*. More competent answers focused on the methods more, with some sound analysis of Browning's use of language and verse form seen. Good answers developed these ideas into a consideration of the 'effects' created, with some confident interpretations of Browning's concerns and also tone.

This enabled some candidates to make contrasts between 'his satirical attitude, often to religious figures, and the more romantic feeling created in *Love in a Life*,' by perceptive analysis of imagery and diction. Others for example noted that 'the excitement of the narrators in *Confessions* and *Meeting at Night* at the secret meetings themselves seemed more important than the relationships.' At this level there was often appropriate reference to context, especially biographical, and some impressively detailed quotation in support of the interpretations offered.

- (b) Weaker answers sometimes struggled with some of the details of the poem, at times suggesting the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. More capable responses did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to discuss some of the points made by the speaker in response to the music. Where candidates had some knowledge of the context, their arguments were often more directed and focused, and could move beyond paraphrase and summary. Competent answers were alive to the shifting moods of the speaker, and where this was supported by awareness of Browning's choices of language and imagery, the answers did well. Good answers were more wide ranging in the choice of poetic methods analysed, with some able to link the poetic metre to the rhythm of the music with some insight. As awareness of the effects of the poetic choices became more analytical, such as how the 'language of musical theory used suggests and defines the variety of the speaker's responses,' as one essay remarked, before exploring those responses in detail, so did the answers become more successful. Very good answers combined a thorough knowledge and understanding of the poem, with perceptive analysis, shaped to the question and supported by well selected contextual details.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was a popular choice in this session, though the overwhelming majority opted for the passage question option (b).

- (a) There were only a very few answers on this question. Most candidates were able to select relevant poems to address the task, with quite a wide range of poems chosen, though *The Hill Fort* and *Hedge School* were popular choices. Weaker answers tended to summarise their selected poems, often showing clear knowledge of the text and sometimes understanding of Sheers's concerns and themes, but undeveloped and basic. More competent answers chose their poems wisely in order to address the 'compare ways' in the question, with many, for example, contrasting how the 'individual in the countryside, such as the man remembering his son, or the boy coming home from school, are often contrasted with the grandeur or the power of the countryside around them,' as one essay suggested. Others found helpful ideas in relevant contexts, such as how 'Sheers's interest in his Welsh heritage is reflected in the countryside he writes about, such as Y Gaer and the valley in *Liable to Floods*'. Good answers developed such ideas by analysing closely some of Sheers's poetic choices. The poet's use of language and choice of tercets, for example, was often discussed and exemplified. Others considered Sheers's use of imagery to 'evoke the grandeur of the Welsh countryside,' as one put it. Very good answers drew all these points together, often integrating textual and contextual references seamlessly, but always carefully considering the effects of the poet's choices on the reader.
- (b) This was a popular choice and inspired some very good analytical responses. Weaker answers were unsure of the meaning of the poem, suggesting a lack of knowledge, though some basic responses were able to offer a broad general summary of the poem, with some occasional moments of understanding of Sheers's concerns. More competent responses were comfortable with explaining the situation and alive to how the 'cutting of the keys' was symbolic of the end of the relationship. Many at this level noted Sheers's concerns of love and separation, togetherness and breaking up and the 'inevitable sexual references when writing about couples,' as one essay suggested. Good answers found plenty to analyse in the poet's choice of language and imagery, with many exploring in detail the 'extended metaphor of locks and keys, suggesting opening and closing, and fitting together and coming apart,' as one stated. For some this was symbolic of 'the strength of the relationships to start with,' whereas others saw 'a lot of sexual symbolism in some of the images, quite typical of Sheers,' as another candidate expressed it. Other good answers also analysed the metre and form, with good analysis of the closing couplet, as well as recognition of the 'circularity of the poem beginning and ending with 'strange,' as one said. Very good answers put the poem into its context, as well as exploring in detail the effects of the different poetic choices identified, often with a perceptive sense of Sheers's wider concerns.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

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

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, with a wide range of poems chosen for discussion. Popular choices were Wordsworth's *A Complaint*, Yeats's *When You are Old*, Sassoon's *The Death-Bed*, Shakespeare's *Sonnet 19* and Hardy's *A Wife in London*. Weaker answers often summarised their chosen poems, with some at this level showing implicit understanding of the poets' concerns and able to broadly discuss differences in the poetic choices. Sounder answers had secure knowledge and understanding of the text, with understanding of and awareness of how a poet might 'explore' a topic within a poetic structure. Competent answers often considered language and imagery and made comparisons between their chosen poets, which was sometimes informed by an awareness of context. Good answers considered a range of poetic methods, including form and rhythm, with some insight into possible effects. This was developed in very good answers into an analytical comparison of poetic choices, informed by precise references and supporting contextual details.
- (b) This was the second most popular question on the paper with almost half of the entry choosing this option. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant comments on Byron's view of darkness. Better answers at this level were aware that it was 'about the finality of the destruction of the world' and that it had an 'apocalyptic atmosphere,' as one essay suggested. Knowledge of the historical context helped some answers to understand Byron's concerns, which were often well developed by consideration of poetic methods, particularly the 'sinister and ominous darkness of heaven and earth,' as one candidate put it. Good answers noted the use of 'irregular free verse, the lack of rhyme and jolting rhythm,' all of which 'conveyed the effect of panic and doom,' as one said. Good answers identified how the atmosphere becomes 'metaphorically darker as Byron describes how humans of all classes were reverting to a primitive state,' as one suggested. Other good answers integrated the contextual background with awareness of Byron's 'politics' and could interpret this poem as a 'manifestation of his depressive and negative views on life and humanity,' as one put it. With detailed textual support and developed analysis of how Byron achieved such poetic effects, these interpretations did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

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

- (a) There were very few responses to this question, with weaker answers tending to discuss poems with which they were familiar rather than poems which directly addressed the task. Better answers at this level did discuss relevant poems, often showing clear knowledge of the text and some understanding. Judicious choice of poems enabled contrasts in Clarke's exploration of time passing to be discussed at least implicitly, with either of the *Sunday* poems popular choices and usefully discussed alongside *Lunchtime Lecture* or *Ichthyosaur*. More competent response discussed how time passing informed many of Clarke's concerns – relationships, nature and families were often discussed, with some noting the 'timelessness of the landscapes compared to the fragility of living things,' as one put it. Good answers looked closely at Clarke's poetic choices, diction and imagery most commonly, but some noted the poet's use of different poetic forms and how 'the structure of *Ram* creates the sense of how much time has passed since death,' as one suggested. Some answers were able to integrate contextual points, for example when discussing *Catrin*. Where the answers were able to integrate context and textual references by analysis of the poetic methods, the answers often did very well.

- (b) This was the third most popular choice from **Section B**, with some very impressive responses seen at the highest level. Some weak answers had little knowledge of the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen, with limited success. Most answers though were able to address the task with some knowledge of the poem. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the poem, at times showing personal engagement with the task, though often speculating as to the causes of ‘the speaker’s problem with the baby – jealousy, a previous cot death, or inexperience of babies?’ as one candidate summarised it. Better answers at this level did show some understanding of the situation, noting how the ‘focus is on the babysitter’s feelings to start with, but then moves to what the baby might feel,’ as one put it. More competent answers developed such interpretations by looking at some of the poetic methods, with language and diction proving to be fruitful areas for analysis. Many noted ‘the hostile language – ‘strange’, ‘rage’, ‘disgusting’ – and the hard verbs ‘hate’ and ‘afraid’,’ as one response summed it up. Others noted how the speaker is imagining ‘the baby’s reaction in order to explain her own emotions,’ before using adult imagery to try and ‘explain how the baby might feel, like an abandoned lover or a bereaved woman.’ Good answers also considered the verse form and the poetic methods such as alliteration and enjambement, which ‘enabled Clarke to really hammer home the speaker’s emotions,’ even though as some noted ‘the baby remains peacefully sleeping.’ Very good answers noted the poetic structure and were often able to integrate appropriate contextual references.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was a popular text in **Section C**, with the majority of candidates choosing option (b), the passage question.

- (a) There were a few essays seen, answering this question. Nearly every essay did have at least a basic knowledge of the text and importantly, its structure. Weaker answers retold some of the story, often in detail, but generally paying scant regard to the task. Better answers at this level were aware that each part had a different narrative style and narrative focus and were able to discuss, albeit partially, some of the effects of this ‘cumulative approach which serves to keep the reader guessing, even at the end, as to what really happened,’ as one put it. Competent answers were able to develop such arguments by close reference to the text, noting in what ways the narrative style changes in each part. Other answers focused more on characters, discussing how and in what ways the characters change and develop through the different sections of the text. Good answers were able to analyse how McEwan’s choices, often of language, were important in showing these developments. Very good answers had a sophisticated command of the details of the text and were able to support their interpretation with appropriate references to the text, whilst also showing perceptive understanding of how for example, ‘the narrative and language choices he makes means that the reader is always unsure of the ‘truth’ revealed by Briony and equally unsure how to evaluate her and her role,’ as one suggested.
- (b) This was a popular question with responses seen at every level of assessment. Nearly every answer had at least a general awareness of the textual context and some were able to develop this into an evaluation of the passage in terms of its significance to the novel as a whole. Weaker answers often summarised the key events in the relationship, with at times little reference to the given passage. Better answers at this level had knowledge of the text and some understanding of the concerns. Some candidates, for example, were aware of the importance of Cecilia’s rejection of her family and commitment to Robbie at this point and ‘how that changes the direction of the novel into a more ‘romantic’ story than part 1 had suggested it might be,’ as one essay stated. Competent answers looked at the ‘presentation’ in more detail, with many noting how the passage ‘is slanted from Robbie’s viewpoint, but McEwan uses the letter so that we also gets Cecilia’s angle on things as well,’ as one candidate put it. Better answers developed such ideas by looking closely at the language, comparing Robbie’s ‘more factual, descriptive words,’ to Cecilia’s ‘emotional, almost angry outpourings,’ as one essay saw it. Good answers were able to analyse the narrative voice and the diction carefully, often exploring how McEwan shapes the reader’s response to the relationship, ‘for the reader is not sure that Robbie is innocent at this point, despite Cecilia’s faith in him,’ as one essay put it. Other good answers were able to explore McEwan’s concerns in detail; as well as ‘the love story, he returns to his themes of class, education and family, in the passage, all of which have a profound effect on the relationship throughout the novel,’ as one summed it up.

Good answers were always able to support ideas with apposite quotation from the passage and at times the wider text, with at times a sharp awareness of appropriate contexts.

Question 10

NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

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

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) Weaker answers were unsure of the textual context for this passage and often retold the passage in their own words, with better answers at this level showing some knowledge and a general understanding of Namidi and the significance of the plantation. Sounder answers were able to explore some of the concerns in more detail, noting for example, 'the way wealth corrupts so that Namidi is changed even before he gets back to the village, as the women notice,' as one candidate put it. Other competent answers considered some of the methods, such as the choice of diction which 'contrasted the beauty of the natural world, with a "glow of curious mysteriousness", with the "sickness" of the petrol,' as one essay suggested. Good answers developed such discussions by considering the narrative voice, the use of contrasting images and the sentence structure, with the 'climactic short statement "it was petrol"', as one essay noted. Other good answers saw how Namidi is a 'symbol for how the simple honesty of the native life in the bush is corrupted by the capitalist industrialisation,' as one summed it up, with some essays noting how this leads to destruction and disaster, often supporting the ideas with reference to textual and historical contexts.

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 on the (a) question and the majority of candidates choosing the passage.

- (a) Nearly every response was able to find relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold Jim's story in detail with little reference to Twain's presentation, but often showing a clear basic knowledge of the text and some understanding of the concerns. Often there was an engaged personal response on the evils of slavery, though sometimes this was not fully connected to the text itself. More competent answers were able to select specific moments in the text which supported what they considered to be the key points of Twain's presentation, 'for though Twain makes it clear it is wrong, he shows it by the way Jim behaves and Huck responds, rather than lecturing his readers about it,' as one essay summed it up. Good answers were able to look closely at Twain's methods: the first-person narrator, the language, and the way the author uses contrasts such as 'Christian believers, doing good works, yet still wanting to hunt down Jim, opposed to the simple yet morally right views of the uneducated, Huck, helping Jim run away,' as one candidate argued. Others noted how often the negative attitudes to the slaves were in the 'mouths of the worst people, such as Huck's father,' as one noted. Others explored the presentation of Jim in detail, his love for his family, his simple honesty and beliefs and his loyalty to Huck, all of which were in 'stark contrast to how the white folk treated Huck, even Tom,' as one summed it up. Such answers were often supported by appropriate contexts and did very well.
- (b) Weaker answers were unsure of the context and at times had an uneven knowledge of the passage, with some suggesting that 'Huck was hiding from Jim who was trying to kill him,' as one answer put it. Better answers at this level did have some basic knowledge and understanding of the passage and were able to explain why Huck was so 'scared as he floated down the river in the fog, wondering what had happened to Jim,' as one summed it up. More competent answers consider the effects of the language and Huck's first-person narration, which 'carry the reader

through the story as Huck is carried along the river – not sure what is happening and unable to make things out,’ as one candidate neatly put it. Many answers considered the reliability of the narrator as a general problem of Twain’s choices, though others thought that Twain ‘here reminds us that Huck is still a boy, alone and frightened in the American wild lands,’ as one essay noted. Good answers considered Twain’s concerns in detail: Huck’s rite of passage, friendship, the power of nature, abandonment and the insignificance of humans in the natural world were all explored. Other answers could analyse the effects of the first-person narrator in detail, Twain’s language choices, the use of ungrammatical phrases and the short often unfinished sentences all of which ‘give us a clear picture of Huck’s state of mind “dismal and lonesome” as he describes it,’ as one argued. Good answers focused on the presentation and were often able to integrate appropriate contexts, textual and historical, into their interpretations.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Poetry, Prose and Drama

Key messages

- 1 Candidates should plan their essays and reflect their decisions in their opening paragraphs.
- 2 When analysing the literary methods of a writer, candidates should explore the effects of the methods as well.

General comments

There were responses seen on nearly every text in **Section A** and **Section B**. *All My Sons* and *Much Ado About Nothing* were the most popular **Section A** texts. The selection from *Songs of Ourselves* was the most popular **Section B** text, with a more or less equal spread across the other three texts in this section. Answers were seen only on the selection from *Stories of Ourselves* in **Section C**. The large majority of candidates showed evidence of appropriate preparation, with at least a sound basic knowledge of their two texts and some ability to select relevant material to address the given tasks. There were some rubric errors in this session, with candidates either answering on too many questions or answering two questions from the same section. It is important that candidates understand the optionality on the paper if they are to achieve the best mark possible. The quality of the expression was generally appropriate to the task, though some candidates are at times disadvantaged by a lack of clarity in their writing.

There are two specific issues to be addressed in this session:

- 1 Candidates should always spend some time in planning their response and deciding what material is relevant to their interpretation before beginning to write their essay. This planning might lead neatly to an opening paragraph in which the candidate addresses the key terms of the task and is able to set the direction of their essay in a controlled and focused way. Without such moments of preplanning and forethought, the opening of an essay can become too generalised and easily drift into contextual speculation from which it is sometimes difficult to regain the appropriate focus on the given task.
- 2 In passage questions, candidates are required to analyse some of the choices made by the writer. Most candidates in this session were able to discuss such technical issues as alliteration, enjambement and rhyme schemes. It is important that such discussions do not simply become a mechanical checklist. To reach the higher levels of assessment candidates need to explore the **effects** of the methods identified on an audience or reader. They might also consider how the effects might be different on different audiences and readers and in this way explore different, sometimes contrasting, interpretations of their chosen text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

- (a) Weaker answers tended to summarise some of the marriages, both actual and potential, often showing clear knowledge of the text and some understanding of the differences between, for example, the Baylisses and the Kellers. Better answers at this level had some awareness of 'different attitudes', comparing Sue Bayliss and Kate Keller, for example, and were able to select discussion points relevantly. Sounder essays often focused on the characters' attitudes to their partners or less commonly their marriage. Chris and Ann provoked a wide range of responses, from 'theirs is the only positive relationship, based on love and respect for each other,' to a 'shock that they could be so insensitive to their families, already broken by death and imprisonment.' Good answers saw how Miller used different and even changing attitudes as a key method of characterisation, noting, for example, 'Chris's reluctance to confront his mother until it is almost too late.' Others explored how attitudes to marriage were essential to the play's structure and plot – Joe's determination to protect his compared to George's intention to prevent Chris and Ann's, for example. Very good answers supported such arguments with specific textual references and a good grasp of appropriate contexts.
- (b) Some weaker answers were unsure of the context to this passage and in some cases even George's relationships with the other characters. Other answers at this level often paraphrased some of the exchanges or explained George's back story and situation in detail, with a consequent loss of focus on the passage, though often showing sound knowledge of the text. More competent answers had secure understanding of the significance of the passage, and George's role as the 'agent of destruction of the Kellers' false front,' as one candidate suggested, though others thought 'George is the vehicle whereby Miller is able to move the plot forward and build tension.' His relationships with his father and sister were much discussed, with some seeing 'the guilt for abandoning his father,' as Miller's way of developing audience sympathy to his cause. Other answers though saw the lawyer in his 'forensic cross examination of Chris to reveal his insecurities.' Good answers explored the dramatic methods closely: the stage action, the linguistic tension, the use of tone, the effect of the stage directions and the movement of the actors were all well explored, along with the language and dialogue. Very good answers focused on Miller's presentation in their analysis of these methods, showing excellent understanding of George's situation and 'his moral dilemma of choosing between father, his sister and his boyhood hero, with the consequent destruction of the Kellers and potentially his sister,' as one put it.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

- (a) This was a minority choice, with only a very small number of candidates answering this question. Weaker answers mostly retold Don Pedro's involvement in the play, often in great detail, showing clear knowledge of the text, though little understanding or awareness of Shakespeare's methods. Better answers were able to identify different aspects of Don Pedro's role and characterisation, 'for we see him,' as one response expressed it, 'initially as a warrior prince, defeating his enemies, then as leader, putting his subjects at ease, before turning into a sort of cupid, helping the lovers get together.' More competent responses showed understanding of how Shakespeare develops his role, 'perhaps creating sympathy through Don John's hatred and Beatrice's rejection of him' as one candidate suggested. Other sound answers explored how he is important in revealing some of the play's main concerns: loyalty, love and attitudes to women were often well discussed. Good answers analysed his relationships in more detail, often exploring the language well, from 'his soothing tone with Leonato, to his wooing of Hero and Beatrice, and his comic jesting with Benedick and Claudio,' as one noted. Where such arguments were supported by apposite quotation and awareness of context, the answers did very well.

- (b) This was the second most popular question in the **Drama** section. Nearly every answer knew the context clearly and was able to respond to Hero's situation with engagement. Weaker answers offered a narrative summary of the preceding events, as well as the passage. More focused answers at this level could explore the significance of the passage to the play's concerns, at least in general terms. Many were exercised by 'Leonato's totally selfish response to Hero's situation, not showing any care or sympathy and even wishing she were dead,' as one candidate summarised it. Competent answers contrasted his response with those of Beatrice, Benedick and especially the Friar, with many making sound contextual points about the patriarchy and attitudes to daughters and women in general. Most answers were very sympathetic to Hero's situation, though only a few pointed out that the audience is already assured of her innocence. Others noted the 'hyperbolic plea, including torture and death, she makes to her father,' often noting her weakness in contrast to Beatrice's strength. Good answers considered the language in detail, analysing the effects of Leonato's 'pit of ink' for example, contrasted to the more measured language of the Friar. Others noted the change in mood, 'to tragic so that the denouement might be more satisfying,' as one essay suggested, with many discussing Benedick's perceptiveness in identifying Don John as the villain, in 'contrast to Leonato's trust in his hierarchical masters.' Many answers at this level integrated appropriate contexts into the body of the analysis and often did very well.

Question 3

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

This was a minority choice of text in **Section A**, with about an equal split of responses on the two options.

- (a) Weaker answers tended to retell everything they knew about Jero, with many answers showing clear knowledge of the text and some understanding of Soyinka's basic concerns, though often lacking direction and focus on the specifics of the task. Better answers at this level noted that Soyinka shows different aspects of Jero to influence his audience, 'so that although he comes across as corrupt and egotistical, he seems better than that in comparison to the other prophets and the politicians,' as one response put it. Competent answers were able to select relevant material from both plays to develop such arguments, with some exploring the plays' dramatic structures and 'how Soyinka includes comedy and violent action to show the audience the real Jero, such as him jumping out of the window and then preaching in his robes on the beach,' as one candidate summarised it. Other sound answers considered the language, with some identifying the 'different voices that Jero has, depending on who he is speaking to,' or looking in detail at his words – 'religious for Chume, political for the minister and always gentle and inviting for Rebecca,' as one essay suggested. Good answers looked in detail at the dramatic methods, with some analysis of the effects of Soyinka's choices and often a good grasp of the significance of contexts to Soyinka's satirical comedy.
- (b) Weaker answers were not always sure of the textual context to this passage, but often had detailed knowledge of the relationship and how it developed. Some answers spent too long summarising the events generally with a consequent lack of focus on the passage itself, though there was some understanding of the significance of this exchange to the overall plot of the play. More competent answers saw how Soyinka sets up the antagonism between them and, indirectly, the connection to Jero, as a 'way of developing the characterisation to lead to the dramatic entrance of Chume near the end of the play,' as one put it. Other sound answers considered some of the dramatic methods, such as Soyinka's use of stage directions, choice of language and the visual impact of the couple on the stage, often recognising how these methods created the 'feeling of a hen-pecked man totally under the control of his dominating wife,' as one candidate saw it. Good answers noted the effects of these choices and how they helped Soyinka develop his concerns through the relationship – marriage, attitudes to men, the role of women and for many candidates the 'important comic element in an otherwise serious play,' as one suggested. Answers which analysed the language in detail, with appropriate reference to the passage, often did very well.

Question 4

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.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

ROBERT BROWNING: Selected Poems

This was a relatively popular choice in this session with an even split between the two options.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems with which to address the question. Weaker answers were sometimes unsure in their knowledge of the text, which limited the development of the response. More successful answers at this level were able to provide a summary of their chosen poems, with some understanding of the different attitudes to death presented. Choosing contrasting poems, for example *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed's Church* and *Porphyria's Lover*, popular choices, enabled candidates at least partly, to consider different types of presentation with confidence, often leading easily into a consideration of some of Browning's poetic methods. More competent answers focused on the methods, with some sound analysis of Browning's use of language and verse form seen. They were also more wide ranging in the text, with *Confessions* and *The Confessional* offering different kinds of narrative approaches to discuss. Many were able to explore the effects of the first person narrator, recognising that, 'though the speakers were jealous lovers or holy bishops or simply victims of deception, the outcome, death, was the same,' as one response put it. Good answers developed these ideas into a consideration of the language in more detail, noting how Browning's choices enable the creation of 'a vivid picture of the speaker's mental state whether jealousy or outrage or regret,' as one essay noted. Other good answers were able to explore tone, often through the language analysis, noting Browning's use of satire and irony, for example, to good effect. Very good answers often considered other poetic methods such as poetic form and rhythm and where such points were supported by precise quotation and some analytical awareness, the answers were very successful.
- (b) Weaker answers at times struggled with some of the details of the poem, so that it seemed the extract was being discussed as an unseen. This inevitably limited the success of any interpretation offered. More capable responses did have knowledge of the poem and, at times, understanding enough to discuss some of the points made by the speaker in response to the artist. Knowledge of the context was very useful in informing the interpretation and helped candidates move beyond paraphrase and summary. Competent answers were at least in part able to discuss the emotions and the moods of the speaker with some awareness of the effects of the language. Good answers considered other poetic methods, with some able to analyse the poetic metre, for example, in terms of the speaker's shifting moods. Others focused more on imagery, noting the 'use of abstracts to convey the speaker's obsession with human faces,' as one put it. Very good answers often had perceptive analysis, which was supported by well selected quotations and some appropriate contextual details.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was not a popular choice in this session, with the majority who chose this text responding to the passage (b) question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was a more popular choice and inspired some very good analytical responses. Weaker answers were unsure of the meaning of the poem, suggesting a lack of knowledge, though some basic responses were able to offer a broad general summary, with some occasional moments of understanding of the poem. Better answers were able to move beyond summarising the poem, into a more detailed consideration of Sheers's concerns: growing up, the countryside, childhood and, for some, 'latent sexuality.' Others noted the poet's use of 'disturbing language and imagery to show the violence and passions just below the surface of a young boy,' as one candidate put it. Good answers looked more closely at the 'effects' of these poetic choices, with some considering rhythm and verse form as well. Some answers were able to integrate contextual points – Sheers's love of the countryside and Wales – into their interpretations and where this was supported by developed analysis and precise references to the poem, the answers did well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular text on the paper, though all but a small minority opted for the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** Nearly every response was able to select relevant poems to discuss, with a wide range of the selection offering suitable choices. Weaker answers tended to summarise their chosen poems with only a general awareness of the demands of the question. With a more considered selection of contrasting poems, better answers were, at least implicitly, able to see contrasts and comparisons in the poetic choices. For example ‘the stylised posturing of Dryden’s abandoned woman in *Farewell, Ungrateful Traitor* seems quite empty when compared to the real agony of the new widow in Hardy’s *A Wife in London*,’ as one noted. Better answers developed such insights by looking closely at language and imagery, for example Wordsworth’s use of the fountain in *A Complaint* with the fireside in Yeats’s *When You are Old*. Good answers often considered other poetic methods such as form and rhythm in their comparisons, and where these explored the different effects of the choices, the answers were very successful. One common aspect of the good answers was how easily the candidates could refer to their chosen poems to find appropriate supporting quotations.
- (b)** This was the most popular question on the paper with almost two thirds of the entry choosing this option. Weaker answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant comments on the atmosphere of the wedding. Better answers at this level were able to explore the meaning of Alvi’s poem, often showing understanding of ‘the conflict caused by the diaspora,’ as one suggested. Sound answers were aware of the cultural clashes and were able to explain them in detail, with more competent responses linking such ideas to the poetic methods, often focusing on language and imagery, for example. Others explored the tone, noticing the ‘harshness of the English culture compared to the dreaminess of the Pakistani references,’ as one put it. Other responses noted that Alvi ‘slips in references to colonisation – “sandalwood smugglers” and “England spilled out” – to address the roots of why her identity is split in two.’ Good answers developed such interpretations by close reference to the details of Alvi’s poetic methods, with very good responses exploring the different effects of the poet’s choices and how this created the reader’s ‘sense of the confusion and perhaps fear felt by the bride on what ought to be her special day,’ as one essay put it. For example, one candidate noted that it is ‘called the wedding and not my wedding, so that the reader feels the bride’s separation from the event.’ Other very good responses looked closely at how Alvi creates ‘the difference between the dream and the reality, so that the reader shares the speaker’s feelings intensely,’ as one said, with some perceptive analysis of the imagery such as the ‘buffaloes under water’ and the vivid colours. Where such ideas were supported by appropriately integrated contextual references the answers often did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was not a very popular text in this session, with almost no answers seen to **Question (a)**. There were though a reasonable minority who chose the passage **(b)** question.

- (a)** There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Weaker answers tended to offer a narrative summary of the poem, often speculating on the situation, with little regard to the poem’s title. Better answers at this level were able to show knowledge of the poem’s meaning and some understanding of Clarke’s concerns, ‘the past and the present, death and how the living cope with mortality,’ as one response stated. Competent answers moved beyond narrative and were able to explore some of Clarke’s methods, most often language and diction, with some awareness of the imagery and partly its effects, ‘with ‘the shroud of silence’, capturing both the morbidity of a dead body, but also how it would keep its secrets,’ as one put it. More analytical answers noted how the language and rhythm of the poem changed in each stanza, ‘as the speaker moves from a listener to looker and then a responder,’ as one suggested. Good answers also noted the poetic voice, so that the first stanza is ‘an indirect quotation of the lecturer, whereas the second and third stanza reflect the speaker’s responses moving from imagining finding the skull to recreating its life,’ as one noted. Very good answers developed such arguments

with close reference to supporting details, exploring the closing 'extended metaphor of the tree, suggesting permanence in the female experience but also how it has its seasons and changes,' as one candidate said. Others were able to see how the presentation here 'enabled Clarke to explore her concerns in a moving way,' with some sharp analyses of rhythm and stanza form seen in the best answers.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

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

Question 10

NGŨGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

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

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Weaker answers were unsure of the textual context for this passage and often retold the passage in their own words, with better answers at this level showing some knowledge and a general understanding of the life of the rural poor. Answers at this level tended to drift into general social observations, often asserted and unrelated to passage or text. Sounder answers were able to explore in what ways the narrator's attitude to the poor was critical in shaping the reader's response. Better answers considered the language, 'often of poverty and deprivation and depressing in tone,' as one answer put it. Good answers explored some of the writer's methods: the use of a first-person narrator, the 'insinuated attitudes of the other townsfolk leading to isolation,' the language of deprivation and criminality and, in some more analytical answers, the way the narrative structure shapes the response. Good answers developed such arguments with close reference to the passage in the context of the wider story, enabling the answers to consider the significance of the details in the passage, but maintaining a sharp focus on the details of the passage and the methods and effects revealed by them.

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.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

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There were too few candidates for a meaningful report to be produced.