

LANGUAGE AND 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. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B**.
- Candidates should focus on the key instructions in the questions they answer, which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for 'your first blog entry', creating a sense of 'excitement and anticipation.'
- Candidates must write in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences, and would do better to aim for clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Sentence demarcation is key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging blog entries and creating anticipation by indicating to the reader what the next blog might contain. Weaker responses consisted of simple accounts of the writer's travels, often focusing almost totally on packing, obtaining documents and the journey to get there. Others demonstrated the need to read the question carefully, as they covered all 3 months in a single blog entry.

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 candidates focused mostly, or entirely, on the content of their piece of writing and therefore only provided minimal analysis of their writing by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses in **Section B** generally lost focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were purely narrative in form. 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 the visit to the café and the food and drink consumed, with little in the way of critique or personal opinion about the café.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You have recently left home and are spending three months living and studying in another country. You have decided to write a blog about the experience.

- (a) Write the text for your first blog entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of excitement and anticipation.**

Some candidates demonstrated a zest for adventure in their responses to this question. The majority of blogs were written in an appropriate semi-formal register, which created at times a lively and engaging tone.

Stronger candidates used helpful organisational features such as subheadings and clear topic sentences, and used evocative descriptions to reflect their excitement. One strong example from a candidate studying in England described, 'seaside cliffs where salt-scented wind whips through your hair'; 'famously English foggy mornings' and 'castles and palaces ... equally paragons of grand beauty and vessels of secrets and history' – an example of effective description without reliance on common adjectives.

Stronger responses had a clear idea of where the writer was travelling to and what they would be studying. Candidates selected appropriate topics that allowed exploration of the theme presented in the question. It seemed that selecting a place that the candidate was familiar with resulted in better responses. In addition, better responses demonstrated an ability to adapt writing for an appropriate audience, and clearly these candidates had experience of practising this genre of writing. Stronger responses often established a tone of excitement from the very first sentence of the writing, as in these two examples: 'This is awesome! My studies have taken me straight to Japan'; 'Besides talking and learning about Italy, music is one of my favorite things ever. Adding Italy and music together is like adding Ice cream to an Ice cream cone.' The best looked closely at their initial student experience and explored the emotions of being in a different place on one's own, for example: 'The high street explodes with colour and confidence on Sundays when the market is in full swing,' and, 'Being a new kid on the block is no shame in this slice of paradise.'

Weaker responses showed little variance in vocabulary: 'Italy is a very nice place. The house I am staying is very nice.' Many were vague and focused mainly on the journey, bringing in anticipation and excitement, but not dealing with the feeling of establishing themselves in a new area. Lots were filled with generic comments on wonderful culture or on language problems and eating new sorts of food. Some responses became too informal and word choice was too colloquial. Technical accuracy slipped as a result of informality and many weaker responses were hampered by grammatical errors, for example using commas instead of full stops between sentences. Ideas were mostly relevant but at times undeveloped. Many missed the requirement that this had to be the first blog entry, and degenerated into lengthy reports on what happened during the entire three months. In one or two extreme cases, events were described that could not possibly take place within three months.

(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)**. Generally, responses would have been improved with greater attention to detail and by including evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response in the commentary.

Stronger responses showed an understanding of language and the need to provide some evaluation and analysis of how language functioned in the blog. They wrote in detail about the specific effects of structural and language features. Such features included figurative language, humour, hyperbole and discourse markers. They clearly identified their linguistic choices, gave quotations, explained the reasons for the choices and what effects they hoped to have on the reader. For example: 'By using first person pronoun "I", and second person plural pronoun "you", I make the text more personal as I address the reader directly and add to the conversational tone of the blog. Similarly, the slang contraction "JK" conveys the idea that I am talking to someone of my own age who I know.'

Weaker responses sometimes showed an ability to identify some basic language and structural features, but more difficulty was demonstrated in analysis. Some candidates attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'This makes it easy for the readers to understand'. Many included basic general commentary on the content of their blog with no relevant language or structural points being made. Others wrote about basic things such as having written in paragraphs 'to make the blog easier to read' or having used commas 'to make the sense clear'. They often struggled to reference specific words or phrases from their article 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, wrongly identified linguistic features, and had little or no comment on structure.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Descriptive piece

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

A significant number of candidates successfully used the technique of a framed narrative, typically describing a lesson from start to finish. For several 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.

Candidates who wrote stronger responses were able to keep to the descriptive stance throughout the piece and to create an image of the classroom as a vibrant place. Sound and movement were described with subtlety and precision. Some candidates used contrast and described the classroom at different times, for example before the day began and in the middle of a noisy lesson, observing the changes that had taken place. These candidates invariably established the descriptive form in the very first paragraph or sentence, for example: 'Hundreds of feet stomp on the floor, some running, some swiftly walking, others taking their sweet time. The chatting and screaming of laughing candidates echo everywhere.'

In stronger responses, a variety of linguistic techniques was used, for example metaphorical language: 'The sea of grey carpet hosted vibrantly coloured thrones for the children.' One successful example used a zooming in technique; it started above the school then gradually arrived in the classroom, focusing on various details. Another brought some immediacy to the descriptions by writing in the present tense about the classroom in which they were sitting the exam: 'His legs have started silently bouncing and his fingers drum his pen against the desk,' and, 'You are still entangled in hell with the sound of your arm drifting on your paper and the voices your pen produces as it rolls and stains your paper.'

Weaker responses were sometimes planned poorly, resulting in most of the piece being about what preceded getting to the classroom or was involved in the process of moving from one classroom to another. Some described various students in the classroom but focused mainly on the dialogue between them. Others began with some descriptive detail but ended up writing accounts of an incident which happened in the classroom or stories of disastrous substitute teacher lessons. Some of the weakest responses were lacking

in sentence control, revealed in sentence fragments such as, 'Watching the teacher pace back and forth. Doing their best to cram as much knowledge in your head as they can, like a child shoves food in his mouth.'

Question 3 – Essay

In class, you have been discussing whether it is worse to have too much money or not enough. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

It would appear that many candidates took the lack of a form of transactional writing as reason to use fewer rhetorical devices, and at times responses would have been improved with some adaptation to audience. Many candidates organised their essays using discourse markers, a more appropriate approach than incorporating sub-headings.

Stronger responses assumed an authoritative stance and maintained the appropriate form. They presented a balanced argument showing both sides of the debate and revealed the candidate's own opinion at the end. The best answers were organised into paragraphs, each paragraph dealing with a different point and introduced by a topic sentence. They convincingly and effectively used rhetorical questions and statistics, and the strongest responses were formal in tone, presenting arguments in a well-structured and convincing manner. They took a clear line of argument and took readers coherently through the argument point by point to construct a convincing overall case. Stronger responses contained both an argument and a counter argument or had some sort of evaluation of each side of the argument. For example, more nuanced responses identified that, while in many ways a plentiful supply of money relieves someone of financial worries in everyday life, it can also make it difficult to trust the motives of those claiming to be friends

Stronger essays often began with an opening statement to engage the reader, setting out a point of view, as in this response: 'It is time to face the fact – wealth is probably the most important factor in a person's identity in the modern world.' They used discourse markers to structure the response and to demonstrate clear development. Some candidates opted to use the sequential 'Firstly', 'secondly' and 'finally' approach, which gives clarity and an overall impression of ideas developed clearly in terms of structure. More effective and sophisticated responses incorporated phrases such as 'A different viewpoint' or 'On the contrary'.

Weaker responses 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. They often presented a one-sided argument, which was often a little repetitive with the same points made several times rather than offering a selection of reasons. They often repetitively used the words from the question: 'It is worse not to have enough money than to have too much money', sometimes as much as three times in one paragraph, with very little effort being made to vary the lexis being employed.

Many weaker essays were not structured clearly, often without any use of paragraphs. In some cases, candidates did not employ sufficient vocabulary or control of sentence structure to express some of the more complex ideas, for example: 'Too little money can make your life very hard,' and, 'So, the point is that, when you can access anything there's not going to be emotions when buying them.' Responses were sometimes short or unfinished, while in many other cases ideas needed more adequate development.

Question 4 – Review

You recently went to a new café in your town. Write a review of the café, which will be published in your local newspaper. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Candidates who wrote stronger responses were highly adept at this particular genre of writing, employing a range of stylistic conventions in order to create a sophisticated response. They maintained an authentic persona of an interested reviewer throughout and gave a clear account of the food, service and atmosphere. Some used humorous touches successfully. The best gave a clear idea of a café, possibly one the writer had frequented, and commented clearly on its qualities and failings. One more engaging review incorporated a lengthy description of a particular confection which the writer fondly remembered baking as a child with their grandmother and which they had not until now been able to find 'properly made'. This enthusiasm brought the scene to life. Such reviews gave the impression a good number of candidates had read pieces like this before.

Weaker responses, instead of focusing on the purpose of critically reviewing the café, focussed on the writer's own personal likes and dislikes in the way of food and beverages in a process of listing. Others didn't manage to create a clear picture of the place or were critical of a member of the café staff in a way which

would have made the review inappropriate for publishing in a local newspaper. Some weaker reviews contained little or no detail about the food or drinks. Such reviews often focused on the décor, service or the condition of the toilets, and needed to show greater awareness of the intended audience.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/12
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B**.
- Candidates should focus on the key instructions in the questions they answer, which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a 'short speech' to your school, 'persuading everyone' to lower their sugar consumption by 'giving advice' and creating a 'sense of motivation'.
- Candidates must write in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences, and would do better to aim for clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Sentence demarcation is key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates failed to answer **Question 1(b)** at all.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging speeches entries with an appropriate focus on the benefits of being in a large school. Weaker responses consisted of simple lists of the benefits, needing more in way of an attempt to engage the 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 focused entirely on the content of the piece of writing and therefore only provided minimal analysis, usually only indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.



Stronger responses on **Section B** generally had a strong sense of the appropriate form for the task; (story, article 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 stories in **Question 2** were in need of a sense of drama or suspense. Some responses to **Question 3** were limited in development of opinions, while some **Question 4** responses were simple accounts of the event, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You have been learning about why much sugar is bad for you. Your headteacher has asked you to give a short speech to the school, persuading everyone to reduce the amount of sugar they eat.

- (a) **Write the text for the speech, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the atmosphere at your school, and give advice on improving diet, and create a sense of motivation.**

Nearly all candidates clearly understood the purpose and audience for this task. Degrees of formality varied, which was to be expected given the range of cultural backgrounds across the entry for the examination. A minority of responses were too long, which often impacted on the candidates' ability to write a **Section B** response of the required length, whereas some responses were very short and did not fully utilise the 400 words at their disposal. Others wrote very short responses, sometimes with fewer than 200 words, which lacked development. The majority of answers were focused and often showed knowledge of the downsides of taking too much sugar. It was often referred to as 'an addiction', or even a 'poison' or as a 'silent killer'.

Stronger responses included relevant devices such as rhetorical questions, direct address and repetition to engage the audience. They often used an effective introductory sentence as a hook, as in this example: 'Imagine this: a highly addictive substance, condoned by the government, sold at every supermarket in every country during every hour of every day.' They clearly stated the purpose of the speech, such as in this example: 'We're here today to talk about an addiction. One that affects many of us, myself included. Sugar.' They maintained a close focus on the speech form as well as addressing the audience and establishing and sustaining an appropriate tone and register. They often concluded their speech with a motivational call to action, such as in these two examples: 'Take this step and change your life. Eat well. Sleep well. Live long and enjoy all that this world and this one life has to offer'; 'I know each of you has the will power to make this crucial change for the benefit of your future health.'

Many candidates effectively incorporated their own experience, real or imagined, into the speech and used this as one means of persuasion. Appropriate lexis was often employed, especially for medical conditions and discussion of food groups. A few candidates referred to suitable role models.

In weaker responses, attention to the speech form in the opening was often overlooked and this sometimes resulted in responses which were more article-like or essay-like in their form. They sometimes did not utilise a paragraph structure or any discourse markers, but occasionally included titles and sub-headings, which were not appropriate for the specified form. Some responses were in need of suggestions of ways to improve diet and often did not include any rhetorical devices. Such responses were often hampered by grammatical errors, for example using commas instead of full stops between sentences. Ideas were mostly relevant but at times undeveloped. For example, in this response, while content was generally relevant, the range of language was limited, and errors were frequent: 'These delights are wonderful, even the most healthiest person on this planet cannot resist them, I can bet my life on that but sometimes they get a teeny tiny bit too much for us which causes alot of difficulties in our day to day lives.'

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

One approach that worked well was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of the response to **Question 1(a)**. Many responses would have been improved with greater attention to detail and by including evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response in the commentary.

Stronger responses demonstrated an understanding of language and the need to provide some evaluation and analysis of how language functioned in the article. These candidates wrote in detail about the specific effects of structural and language features, such as figurative language, humour, hyperbole and discourse markers. They clearly identified their linguistic choices, gave quotations, explained the reasons for the choices and what effects they hoped to have on the reader. For example: 'I also asked rhetorical questions, combined with the collective pronoun "we", to create a sense of shared identity between the speaker and the audience. The use of the collective "we" along with the imperative "must" emphasises a shared need to change our eating habits.'

Weaker responses sometimes showed an ability to identify some basic language and structural features but demonstrated more difficulty with analysis. Some candidates attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'This makes it easy for the audience to understand'. Many included basic general commentary on the content of the article with no relevant language or structural points being made. Others wrote about basic things such as having written in paragraphs 'to make the speech easier to read' or having used commas 'to make things clearer'. They often struggled to reference specific words or phrases from their article 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, wrongly identified linguistic features, and had little or no comment on structure.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Story

Write a story called *The Note*, about a message someone received unexpectedly from an unknown source. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The strongest responses established and sustained a clear focus on drama and suspense, whilst the weakest responses tended to offer a list-like series of events and were needing in terms of engagement or narrative structure.

In stronger responses, candidates created drama and suspense from the first paragraph, for example in this opening: 'We could talk about many things but tell me what you want to hear about first. The day? The note? The incident? The worry?' This sense of drama was sustained in a clear and sophisticated manner all the way through the narrative. Another successful opening was: 'It had been a few hours short of four days. I really did not know what to do any more. All I could do was sit by the shore and hope.' Many candidates deliberately, and successfully, delayed any revelations about the contents of the note, and its sender, until the middle of the story. One such dramatic, and sinister, moment occurred during a concert: 'As I shuffled towards the instrument case to make my contribution, the hairy-faced performer stared at me without breaking rhythm and gave me a manic grin.' One candidate successfully used a diary format for their story, using reverse chronology, a novel approach; another very good response focused on a suicide note found by the speaker of the story: 'No iota of lamentation was under-explained as the sender mentioned their gradual descent from self-isolation, depression to gruesome self-harm, manic depression and ultimately the end.'

Weaker responses demonstrated a struggle to create a sense drama and suspense, often missing the 'unknown source' aspect of the question and consisting of tedious accounts, for example of a journey instigated by a mundane note with no dramatic implications. There were also quite a number of inconclusive endings, as if the candidate, having set up a suspenseful scenario, ran out of ideas at the end. Other weaker responses employed plots that were too elaborate, with too many characters involved, leading to a lack of narrative control and organisation, and drifting from one event to the next. Some used too much dialogue, which was often poorly punctuated. Too often the candidates used a 'telling' and not a 'showing' technique, which did not allow for a sense of drama to be created. There was a tendency to incorporate unrealistic occurrences and expression was often hampered by frequent errors, such as in this example: 'He looks at me again and say "Have you been here for a, long time" he asked, removing my earphones "Sorry what did you say" I said to him "Have you been out here for a long time" he says back to me.'

Question 3 – Article

In class, you have been discussing the fact that people do not spend enough time together as a family these days. Write an article for your school magazine, giving your opinion on the topic. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most responses to this question showed engagement and were sustained, with a good number of suggestions as to how families could organise their lives to spend more quality time together. There were candidates who identified that this was not always desirable if a family was dysfunctional, and in these cases, candidates explored the options of creating your own family through a network of friends and other adults within a community.

Stronger responses worked logically through their points, signposting each point clearly through an aptly worded topic sentence or a subheading. Effective topic sentences included: 'Although technology reduces the loneliness one might feel, it also introduces a barrier between loved ones,' and 'Family members often, at times without even realising it, put unnecessary and unjustified amounts of pressure on their children.' Other candidates made use of effective subheadings, such as: 'Is Technology the culprit?', 'Grieving the demise of Games Night', 'Eat, Pray and ... no Love?' Stronger responses included a variety of sentence structures, including short sentences to make their main points clearly and complex sentences for developed explanations. They generally showed a maturity of thought and recognised problems faced through societal pressures for both parents and children within the family unit. Many also recognised the importance of maintaining close contacts with the extended family, whether face-to-face or via internet platforms where geographical separation was an issue. Blame for the loss of quality time with family was apportioned, in the main, to technology, social media, demanding bosses and schools, societal expectations and the pandemic. Many articles ended with a direct and meaningful message for the reader, for example: 'There will be painful regrets when someone close to you passes away and the realisation of thoughtlessly prioritising a screen over a loved one truly hits home,' and 'Family is beautiful, family is love but family is not everything. Find balance; make time both for yourself and your family. You owe it to yourself.'

Weaker responses tended to focus on how busy individuals are in modern life; children with school work and social activities, parents with work and their interests or hobbies. Opinions were often left as assertions and needed to be justified with supporting evidence, even of an anecdotal nature. Such an approach produced quite repetitive articles which did not engage the audience. In weaker responses, candidates often recycled one or two main points without really developing them. They often tended to focus too much on the causes of the problem, usually the over-use of technology and social media and, in particular, the use of smartphones at the dinner table.

Question 4 – Review

You recently went to a local event which takes place once a year in your town. Write a review of the event, which will be posted on a travel website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The question produced responses covering an array of events across the world. Many candidates wrote about local events, whilst others chose to write about events that they had visited or taken part in during a visit to another country.

Candidates who wrote stronger responses were highly adept at this particular genre of writing, employing a range of stylistic conventions in order to create a sophisticated response. They were able to confidently use techniques such as cynicism, irony or humour to criticise the event or to use appropriately formal language and register to comment and review effectively. They made reference to: the circumstances in which the event occurred; its significance to the community; how and why the event was of interest to non-locals; a clear focus on interesting features; merely passing mention of catering and merchandising opportunities; and comfort facilities. Some stronger responses included elements of caricature when describing individuals who were present at the event, or running stalls or games. A number of reviews ended with an effective conclusion, summarising the main points made in the review, such as in this example: 'This event was mostly well organised and showcased a diverse range of musical talent, inspirational artists who rarely appear together on the same stage. Our team at S. Asia Travel Companion give it a qualified 4 stars out of 5.' Others opted for a direct and enthusiastic concluding sentence: 'Grab a friend and a camera and be sure to experience this festival for yourself next year!'

Weaker responses often merely described the event rather than reviewing it. Candidates provided personal accounts of what they did at the event and included very few, if any, of the qualities expected in a written review. Comments and opinions were typically quite simplistic and poorly expressed and punctuated, for

example: 'The vibe of the event is so amoozing the weather is flowing a decent wind to comfort not much heat or not much cold its just amazing and fun to be there.' Weaker responses were also repetitive, including a similar commentary for each aspect of the event to which they referred, sometimes focusing at length on aspects such as toilet and catering facilities, although these were only supplementary to the main purpose of the event. Such candidates were only able to achieve the task in part because the content was only partially or vaguely relevant.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Quite often the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B**.
- Candidates should focus on the key instructions in the questions they answer, which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the task. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instruction is to write the text for a 'short speech' to the 'new candidates' about the 'positive aspects of being in a large school', focusing on the 'atmosphere' and the 'possibilities' that your school offers.
- Candidates must write in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Often, weaker candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences, and would do better to aim for clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety. One error that occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Sentence demarcation is key, followed by accurate use of commas, and then the accurate use of a wider range of punctuation.
- Candidates who have difficulty with tense selection should focus on writing in one tense, preferably either the present tense or the simple past tense.
- Candidates should be encouraged to proofread carefully, particularly for accurate sentence demarcation and for tense confusion/inconsistency. Such errors impede, sometimes seriously, the overall sense of fluency and cohesion.
- Candidates must be aware of the need for clear paragraphing in their responses, including paragraphing for direct speech. A secure focus on structure is crucial since it helps the reader to feel that the candidate is in control of their writing.
- Candidates should be exposed to a wide variety of different text types, as outlined in the syllabus, so that they become familiar with the conventions of a variety of writing forms and purposes. They should be taught key features of those text types, to enable them to replicate these in their own writing.

General comments

A number of candidates self-penalised on the grounds of rubric infringement: some **Section B** responses were appreciably short of the minimum word limit and some candidates did not answer **Question 1(b)**.

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, writing engaging speeches with an appropriate focus on the benefits of being in a large school. Weaker responses consisted of simple lists of the benefits, and needed more in the way of attempting to engage the 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 focused entirely on the content of the piece of writing and therefore only provided minimal analysis, usually only indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some letters in **Question 2** were limited in development of opinions. Some responses to **Question 3** were simple recounts of the documentary, with little in the way of critique or personal opinion, while some **Question 4** responses were narrative in form rather than descriptive.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

A small local school is going to close next month, and the candidates are all going to join your school, which is much larger. Your headteacher has asked you to give a short speech to the new candidates about the positive aspects of being in large school.

- (a) **Write the text for the speech, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on the atmosphere at your school and the possibilities that it offers.**

Nearly all candidates clearly understood the purpose and audience for this task. A minority of responses were too long, which often impacted on the candidates' ability to write a **Section B** response of the required length, whereas some responses were very short and did not fully utilise the 400 words at their disposal. Some responses were fewer than 200 words, resulting in a lack of development.

Stronger responses tended to have a short, snappy introduction and to end concisely, rather than using up too many words to thank the whole school and staff. They communicated a feeling of warmth in the speech opening, showing the candidate had noted the instruction to welcome students from a smaller establishment to a larger one. For example, a casual, jocular opening was used by one candidate: 'Welcome everybody to your next stomping ground ... I'm your candidate nerd ...' while a slightly more formal, but equally relevant, opening was seen in this response: 'Welcome teachers, candidates, other members of the faculty and an additionally warm welcome to our new candidates ... Let this speech mark the beginning of our unity, as one.' Stronger responses showed the right idea about 'selling' a bigger school to new students and wrote well about the benefits such as there being more amenities, more chances to make friendship groups and more sporting opportunities. They also maintained a close focus on the speech form as well as addressing the audience and establishing and sustaining an appropriate tone and register.

Many candidates effectively incorporated their own experience, real or imagined, into the speech, such as in this example: 'When I was young, I lived in the worst neighbourhood imaginable ... Ever since I joined Greendale High, my life flipped around. How did this happen? How do you adapt to a new school?' Other successful responses utilised features of effective speech writing such as judicious listing as in, 'we want you to feel confident, safe and secure'; and affirmation as in, 'Rest assured ...'.

In weaker responses, attention to the speech form in the opening was often overlooked and this sometimes resulted in responses which were more article-like in their form. In a few responses, the candidates' writing was more like an advertisement for a school prospectus, and lacked some of the rhetorical devices that would have made for a stronger connection with the audience. Stylistically, tone was usually a little dull, as was the case in some responses which used a lot of listing of activities and therefore became rather tedious. Weaker responses were often hampered by grammatical errors, for example using commas instead of full stops between sentences. Ideas were mostly relevant but at times undeveloped. For example, in this response, while content was generally relevant, the range of language was limited, and errors were frequent: 'On the other hand, my school have more facilities. For example library, IT room, meeting room, science labs, indoor activities space, and a large field. You have all you need. Studying in a large school is cool. No confusions can be made.'

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

One approach that worked well was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of responses to **Question 1(a)**. Generally, responses would have been improved with greater attention to detail and by including evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response in the commentary.

In stronger responses, candidates used examples from their text, identified linguistic and structural features and commented on their effect. Many candidates began their commentary by reflecting on the form, purpose and audience for their speech; the best responses did this briefly and concisely, whereas weaker responses tended to recycle the question in unnecessary detail. Stronger responses showed an understanding of language and the need to provide some evaluation and analysis of how language functioned in the speech. They wrote in detail about the specific effects of structural and language features, such as hyperbole, figurative language and humour. They clearly identified their linguistic choices, gave quotations, explained the reasons for the choices and what effects they hoped to have on the reader, for example: 'I address the audience in my writing successfully through the use of personification in "Peterhead prides itself ..." which ties into the relationship with the audience and helps ease the audience by giving the sense that Peterhead is not a mass of unknown candidates but a collective group.'

Weaker responses sometimes showed an ability to identify some basic language and structural features, but more difficulty was demonstrated in analysis. Some candidates attempted analysis but used general phrases such as, 'I used simple language so the students would not get bored,' or, 'The choice of words makes it clear for the audience'. Many included basic, general commentary on the content of the article with no relevant language or structural points being made. They often struggled to reference specific words or phrases from their 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, wrongly identified linguistic features, and had little or no comment on structure.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Letter

You recently read a newspaper article called *Why all children should learn to cook*. Readers have been invited to write letters in response to this article. You decide to write a letter, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Arguments in the response ranged from improving the curriculum to home cooking, and effective responses were often characterised by discourse markers such as 'firstly', 'however' and 'moreover'. Many candidates produced a comprehensive and thorough argument to support the idea of children learning to cook, linking it to cognitive development and life skills. Many candidates wrote from a first-person point of view, some with greater success than others. Where a persona had been created, the writing tended to be more authentic and engaging.

Candidates who wrote stronger responses showed an ability leap into an imagined persona, and wrote convincing letters which began clearly, such as in these examples: 'I am a recent retiree from a long-standing career as a chef ...' and, 'As a father of three children, I ...'. One candidate posed as a nutritionist, a successful persona as it enabled the candidate to adopt a knowledgeable tone of voice in the introductory section where some credible context was given about the rising levels of obesity and the impact of the pandemic on children's physical health due to over-eating. The response was well developed with a number of arguments. Stronger responses were written in a concise, controlled style with relevant choices of vocabulary: 'An appalling number of children are growing up with the normalisation of fast food, rather than home cooking, which is rather worrying.' This candidate established an argument in favour of 'involving our kids in the kitchen ... the sooner they become desensitised to the sight of broccoli or egg plant, the better ...'. Other candidates successfully used humour, such as in this example: 'There is an obvious lack of drive when it comes to the admittedly frustrating task of teaching a child not to grate their own fingers while preparing a coleslaw dish.'

In weaker responses, candidates struggled to create a realistic persona and some lapsed into narrative, recounting their own childhood experiences of learning to cook and therefore not really addressing the question. Some candidates wrote one-sided answers supported by a list of reasons, often ending abruptly

with a one-sentence conclusion; meanwhile, a lack of structure was observed in a small number of responses, with more attention needing to be paid to the need for an appropriate letter format with opening and closing salutations and clear paragraphing. Other responses contained points that were made clearly but needed development.

Question 3 – Review

You have just seen a TV documentary about wildlife in the Arctic and Antarctic regions. Write a review of the documentary, which will be posted on a conservation website. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates who chose this question showed a genuine interest in the subject matter, which was usually reflected through positive and sometimes effective language. For example, one candidate described the landscape as ‘magical.’ The question was generally answered quite effectively, and most candidates grasped the particular language and structure needed for a review, whether positive or critical. There were few critical reviews, but they were sometimes very dramatic and insightful.

Stronger reviews were structured clearly, with some effectively deployed subheadings. They gave clear recommendations or criticisms, and provided plenty of detail to get across a real feel for the documentary. They fully engaged with the content and style of the documentary and were able to recount its strengths and weaknesses and to maintain a critical tone and style. The conventions of review writing were sometimes employed to good effect, for example using star ratings or marks out of ten. The website format was indicated by some, with the inclusion of website email addresses. Naming the programme also enabled candidates to write convincingly, for example ‘The King of Wildlife’. Candidates successfully employed emotive language to convey a strong point of view, such as in this example: ‘It was sickening to see how a polar bear could just die from starvation.’ Such reviews were structured well and clearly, concentrating on a different aspect of the documentary – for example music, voiceover narration and camerawork – in each paragraph. Many stronger reviews concluded successfully with summative comments, such as in this example: ‘Overall, this documentary is true art; life-changing, perspective-altering. This has to be one of the most powerful and emotional documentaries of all time. It combines the imagery of a multi-million dollar feature film with a genuine message to the people.’

Some weaker responses went little further than describing the content of the documentary, while some answers needed more in the way of development and felt list-like. A few weaker reviews omitted the expression of a view; such candidates were only able to achieve the task in part because the content was only partially or vaguely relevant to the form and purpose of a review.

Question 4 – Descriptive piece

Write a descriptive piece called *Top of the World*, about being at the top of a mountain. In your writing, focus on the sights and sound to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

In stronger pieces, candidates kept to the descriptive stance throughout and created an image of the summit as a beautiful place inspiring awe. Sights and sound were described with subtlety and precision. Some candidates described the summit at different times, for example in the morning, in the afternoon and before sunset, observing the changes that had taken place. Stronger pieces invariably established the descriptive form in the very first paragraph or sentence, for example: ‘It’s blinding white at the top. No footprints scar the snow as you ascend to the peak.’

Stronger pieces included a variety of linguistic techniques, for example personification: ‘The ground beneath you still bitter and angry that it has somehow been overcome, remains as treacherous and unstable as ever.’ Metaphorical language was also used well, as in this example: ‘Over the edge of the cliff, the clouds form a turbulent sea, rising up and heaving to this energetic wind.’ One able candidate used long, complex, accurately constructed sentences to create descriptive effects when personifying a river that ran down from the top of the mountain. The description included a number of less common vocabulary choices such as: ‘meandered’, ‘traversed’, ‘cascaded’, ‘pounding’. Also, more technical vocabulary was employed such as: ‘rivulets’, ‘glaciers’, and ‘gully’. The choice of vocabulary combined with the lengthy, complex sentences created a real sense of movement.

Weaker pieces sometimes included irrelevant content that was outside the requirements of the task, such as descriptions of the preparations for the mountaineering trip. Some candidates tried to convey the heat of the day through rather clichéd statements, such as: ‘deafening silence’ and ‘fluffy clouds.’ Some of the weakest

responses were lacking sentence control, with sentence fragments and commas used instead of full stops: 'It all just seemed like a patchwork of colours, looked straight out of a van goh painting. The clouds touched my face, I could see the clouds in an eye level.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

1. Essays should always have a clear and appropriate structure on which to build the arguments.
2. Option **(b)** passage responses may usefully place the passage in the wider text as a relevant context.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with the large majority of learners showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a few rubric errors in this session with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are encouraged to ensure that all learners know what is expected of them before they sit the exam. Very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time in this session. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all the texts on the paper, and answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on each of the texts attempted by the learners, with the most popular choices being *All My Sons* in **Section A** and the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B**.

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

1. Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. The overall success of many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would be improved by the essay having a clear structure. This should always include an introduction, which sets out the learner's approach to the given task, followed by a series of interlinked and developing paragraphs, culminating in an appropriate summative concluding paragraph. Such a framework would add a useful sense of direction to essays which otherwise become repetitive and unfocused.
2. Candidates responding to option **(b)** passage questions, who briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, provide valuable textual context. Appropriate contexts may vary according to the type of question being answered. This equally applies to essays on poetry passages, where the appropriate context might be how typical or otherwise the set poem or extract from a poem is of the poet generally, with perhaps brief supporting references to the wider text. Other types of context such as historical or biographical are also very useful, but learners should be encouraged to explore intra-textual contexts as a way of showing appropriate knowledge of the whole text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

This was the most popular drama text on this paper with nearly three quarters of the entry offering responses, of which the majority chose the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold Kate's story, often in great detail, some noting that by the end she has 'lost her son and her husband,' and seeing her as a tragic figure. Better answers at this level were able to discuss her various relationships with her family and the Deevers with some seeing, 'her duality of character represented by her two names, showing two different but justifiable sides to her,' as one suggested. These started to become competent as learners explored how, through these relationships, Miller is able to develop the audience's response in different ways. 'Her loyalty to her husband and sons is what we remember most,' one suggested, though others saw her as a significant factor in Miller's development of the plot. More developed responses explored the variety of ways Kate influences the plot and those around her, especially her family, while others compared her relationships with her husband and sons. Where these discussions were supported by close reference to the text, or supporting quotations, the answers often did well. Very good essays considered in detail some of the dramatic methods used by Miller – his use of dialogue and symbols for example, with some very good explorations of the fallen tree. Others saw how language was often used to shape the audience's response, both in what Kate said herself ('often revealing her stubbornness or refusal to listen to those around her,' as one suggested) or in how the other characters spoke of her or to her ('usually with a guarded almost fearful element in their tone and words,' as another put it). Good answers also considered contexts for 'playgoers of the drama's inception would have contained many mournful mothers like Kate, and hence have a more sympathetic response to her attitudes,' as one suggested. Such essays, especially where they were able to see how different audiences might view her in distinct ways, often did very well.
- (b) This was a popular question, with nearly half of the entry choosing this option. Many were able to place the passage into the context of the wider text, with nearly all answers showing at least some knowledge and understanding of the significance of the passage. Some very weak answers did not have the required knowledge, with insecurity about the relationships and the situation severely limiting the success of the essays. Limited answers tended to either paraphrase the passage, with some personal response to the characters, or retell the 'story' of George and Ann and their relationship to Chris. The success of these essays often depended on the relevance of the supporting comments and the engagement shown in the personal response. Better answers were able to see the significance of the passage in terms of its context in the wider text, with many noting the irony of George arriving with his news about his father at this moment in the play. Many answers saw the dramatic nature of the exchanges here, the 'violent undertones just below the surface, as the audience awaits an outburst from any of the characters on stage,' as one essay put it. Good answers looked closely at the language and the action, noting the hints of tension and violence in the stage directions for example. Others saw the hints of doubt in Chris's words, 'so that we are left wondering how much he really knew,' as one suggested. Anne was also well discussed, her role as the 'peace-maker sitting uncomfortably with the audience perhaps when we find out she has Larry's letter all along,' as one good response stated. Very good answers linked points of characterisation and plot with close analysis of the language and dramatic dialogue. Answers which developed this into an interpretation of the significance of this passage to the wider text often did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

This was not a popular choice overall, with the vast majority of responses choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were very few answers seen on this question. Nearly every response was able to select relevant material to discuss, focusing on Don Pedro and Don John's relationship. Some essays also remembered Leonato and Antonio, whilst a very few also considered the 'military brotherhood of Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick as a significant factor in the play's presentation of loyalty and male bonding,' as one suggested. Weak answers retold some of the key moments from the play, the relevance of which often determined the success of the response. Better answers saw how 'family loyalty or the lack of it, was often contrasted with simple friendship,' as one put it. For other answers the contrast between the two pairs of 'actual brothers was stark, though of course Don John's bastardy was a key element here,' as one said. Those who could explore the characterisation in terms of its effects on the plot and the audience often did well, especially when supporting arguments with relevant, specific references to the text.
- (b) The passage was a more popular choice on this text and most responses were able to find relevant points to make about attitudes to love. Very few were able to place the passage in its dramatic

context with any confidence, which often limited the development of arguments. Very weak answers struggled with even the basic situation and the relationships between the various groups of characters, inevitably limiting the success of any points made. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the various relationships, sometimes in great detail, though often not referring closely enough to what they revealed about love. Success at this level was often determined by how closely the learner explored the actual passage. More competent responses were able to discuss the various attitudes on display, often contrasting Beatrice and Benedick, with Claudio and Hero, in terms of their situations here (and later in the text) and their attitudes. Most commonly 'Hero's ready compliance to her father's agreement and to Claudio is dramatically opposed to Beatrice's position here,' as one stated, though others thought 'her quick recognition of Claudio's jealousy might suggest that Beatrice too has suffered a similar emotion in the past.' Good answers looked carefully at the language and the interplay of the characters, contrasting Hero's silence with Beatrice's volubility. Don Pedro's 'interfering in love here' was often seen as a 'foreshadowing of his later tricking of Beatrice and Benedick'. Other good answers looked closely at Beatrice here, 'who in the absence of Benedick is the dominant force on the stage,' as one suggested. Her refusal of Don Pedro, where discussed, was often done very well, with some good analysis of her 'mocking, almost rude response, as indicated by her uncle's panicked response,' as one noted. Very good answers kept the question clearly in mind, contrasting the different attitudes on display, and discussing what they revealed about Shakespeare's methods of characterisation and the significance of them to the play as a whole.

Question 3

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

This text was a little more popular than the Shakespeare. Again, the vast majority of takers tackled the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were very few responses to this question. Weak answers tended to retell the stories of the two women as revealed in the plays, often in great detail. Success at this level was determined by the relevance of the supporting personal response and the understanding of Soyinka's concerns that was revealed in any commentary. Better answers considered how the women independently influenced the action of the plays and were 'used to develop the characters of the men around them,' as one suggested, with most essays contrasting Amope and Chume with Rebecca and Jero. Good answers were able to develop such ideas into considering Soyinka's concerns in more detail, often his portrayal of male/female relationships, and attitudes to sex and violence. Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text or appropriate quotation, the answers often did very well.
- (b) Most responses were broadly aware of the context, though few were able to place this exchange precisely. Weak answers tended to either summarise the passage or to retell details of the relationship between Jero and Chume. Better answers at this level were able to shape their ideas to the task and offer some personal response on how Soyinka 'mocks the idea of religion and especially its followers here,' as one suggested. Competent answers saw how the dramatic action and the stage directions serve to create a 'dramatic climax, almost like a religious experience for the audience,' as one noted, whilst others explored the 'contrast between the angry husband, the fervent worshippers and the cool, objective Jero,' as one put it. Good answers developed their arguments by referring closely to the dramatic methods, often contrasting the language of the various characters, and noting the effects created by Jero's comments on the various worshippers. Some did explore the comic effects of the various contrasts and consider how different audiences might respond: 'some might even be pleased that Chume is persuaded away from violence by this religious experience,' as one suggested. Others focused more on the hypocrisy, especially given Jero's later change of mind about Amope, and the exploitation of the vulnerable and the needy. Where such arguments were supported by analysis of specific moments from the passage, the answers 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 minority choice in this session, with almost all of the answers opting for 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 relatively popular choice in this session, the third most popular **Section B** question. Most answers were able to explore the poem with some knowledge and understanding. Very weak answers, however, were often puzzled by the situation in the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with consequent weaknesses in understanding and the discussion. Answers in the lower levels of assessment often attempted a paraphrase of the poem, with some recognising how the woman is 'trying to placate her evidently upset lover,' as one suggested. Some answers were distracted into 'speculating about the cause of the falling out,' as one said or in recounting personal experiences of lovers' quarrels. Those who focused on the set poem were more successful, especially where the personal response was linked to the effects of the poem. Better answers considered some of the details of language and poetic voice and what they revealed about the relationship, with some linking this poem to Browning's dramatic monologues and exploring the drama of the situation in the poem, often effectively. Good answers analysed some of the effects of the language – his use of nature, for example, and biblical references. The tone was often seen as 'pleading, like a threatened animal or latter-day Eve defending herself in Eden,' as one said. Very good answers were able to support their interpretations with apposite context and specific reference to the set poem. Only a very few answers were able to discuss poetic methods confidently, but those that did explore the verse form and the rhythms often did very well.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was the second most popular choice of text in **Section B**, the large majority of learners choosing the passage (b) question, with only a very few responses to option (a).

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was a popular question in **Section B**, with many good responses. Nearly every answer showed knowledge of the basic meaning of the poem, though there were some very weak responses which struggled with some of the details – for example, the actual artistic technique that Sheers is celebrating – resulting in some uneven commentaries. Weak answers often paraphrased some of the poem, with the supporting comments or personal response dictating the success of the essay. More competent responses showed clear knowledge of the poem and often sympathetic understanding of Sheers's concerns, linking the artist to Sheers's own 'poetic word pictures of the world and the people around him', as one put it. Such approaches led naturally into considering some of the poetic methods, with some good analysis of the language and Sheers's use of symbols lifting some answers into the higher levels of assessment. Very good answers focused on the effects of the poetic methods identified, with many learners showing a sensitive appreciation of these effects and a perceptive response to the subtleties of some of the details. This led to insightful interpretations, such as how 'Sheers exploration of the artist leads him back to one of the central concerns of his poetry, changing and challenging relationships.' Analyses which referred to specific moments in the poem, with some awareness of the literary and biographical contexts often did very well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over half of the learners choosing this text and most of those offering the (a) essay option.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems to discuss, the most popular choices being Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *If Thou must Love Me*, Moniza Alvi's *The Wedding*, W B Yeats's *When You are Old* and John Warren's *A Song of Faith Foresworn*. Weaker answers had knowledge of relevant poems but were often limited in their understanding of the poetic concerns, so that the required comparison was often only implicit. Better answers at this level often gave detailed summaries of the selected poems and were able to compare them in terms of content and personal response. Where such responses considered some concerns such as loyalty, loss or love, the answers started to become competent. Other sound answers tended to show understanding of the concerns and were able to offer a comparison of the chosen poems, often treating each poem separately with a summative, comparative conclusion. Better answers explored the poetic methods, often the language and the imagery, through specific reference to the text, in some cases showing how the different poets used these methods to shape a reader's response to the presented relationship. Good answers always focused closely on the details of the writing, exploring how the different choices of form, rhythm and rhyme, as well as language and imagery, enable the poets to create effects, often integrating the comparison into the body of the essay. Very good responses developed such points into sophisticated interpretations of the poets' concerns, often selecting appropriate quotations and embedding a telling use of appropriate contexts into their arguments.
- (b) This was the second most popular (b) question from **Section B** on the paper with a quarter of the entry choosing this option. Very weak answers attempting to retell 'the story of the poem,' as one suggested, often struggled to show relevant knowledge, discussing the poem apparently as an unseen and making unconnected points about some poetic aspects of the poem, with little sense of the underlying meaning. Lower-level answers tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a summary with some generally relevant personal response on 'how disappointing it can be to go back to somewhere after you have left it behind,' as one put it. Sounder answers at this level were able to explore the meaning of Peters's poem, often showing some understanding of 'the speaker's feelings of anticipation and disappointment,' as one suggested. Competent answers linked such ideas to the poetic methods, often focusing on language and imagery, for example noting Peters's use of 'natural imagery such as floods, uprooted trees and weeds to convey the sense of unwanted change,' as one put it. Good answers developed such ideas into analysis, exploring the effects of 'loaded words like Virgins and skeletons,' or the imagery of 'death and burial that suggests something gone forever but not forgotten,' as one response stated. Very good answers offered perceptive analysis of the effects of the poetic choices, sensitively interpreting the speaker's 'changing emotions as the situation develops,' as one suggested. Other very good responses offered more metaphorical interpretations, about 'aging and the loss of an important relationship,' as one said. Where such discussions were structured, so that context, analysis and interpretation were fully integrated, the answers often did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was the least popular text in **Section B**, with nearly every learner choosing the passage (b) question.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were very few responses to this question. Weak answers tended to summarise the poem, showing some knowledge, but often very limited understanding of Clarke's concerns. Better answers at this level did have some personal response to share, such as 'Clarke's criticism of the poems would put me off trying to write one,' as one response put it. Sounder answers were aware of Clarke's concerns, noting the 'irony of her writing a poem about poems,' with a few responses thinking this was 'arrogant of her'. Good responses were more focused on Clarke's methods, particularly her use of fire to 'suggest a sort of cathartic experience for her,' as one said. Others developed the analysis of the fire imagery, exploring what it revealed about Clarke's own attitude to poetry – the 'importance of a voice, of poetic skill and having something to say,' as one put it. Very good answers developed such analyses into a sophisticated interpretation of the effects created by Clarke's choices, with in some cases, well-integrated contextual pointing to support their arguments.

Section C Prose

Question 9

E M Forster: *Howard's End*

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

Question 10

ANDREA LEVY: *Small Island*

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 the most popular **Section C** choice in this session.

- (a) There were too few responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Most responses were able to give a broad context to the passage and show some knowledge of the story in general. Weaker answers tended to retell the story up to this point or offer a summary of the events of the given passage and what had preceded it. More competent answers did focus on the meeting itself, with some showing understanding of the narrator's viewpoint and his misinterpretation of the white man's intentions. Better answers at this level noted that the responses revealed something about the characters and their different worlds. More competent answers looked at Ellison's concerns closely, most commonly racism and racial stereotyping and how these were revealed through the dialogue. Good responses looked closely at language and punctuation, noting how Ellison creates 'two dialogues in the extract, between the white man and the black man but also in the narrator's mind,' as one suggested. Some answers were able to consider other methods, such as the narrative voice and Ellison's use of 'telling symbols such as the noose and the Durham to create effects on the reader,' as one put it. Where such interpretations were supported by specific detail from the passage the answers did very well.

Question 12

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.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
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Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

This was the most popular drama text on this paper with over half of the entry offering responses, of which a slight majority chose the passage **(b)** option.



- (a) Almost every response had sufficient knowledge of the text with which to address the task. The main focus was the Keller family, with weaker answers retelling the story of their trials and tribulations often in great detail. Some more successful answers at this level were able to recognise different types of loyalty within the family, contrasting 'Kate's unswerving devotion to Joe, with Chris's more self-righteous attitude to the business,' as one put it. Other responses contrasted Chris and Larry's response to the scandal engulfing the family and some focused on Ann Deever's lack of loyalty to her family, 'as she switches from one brother to the other without apparently much emotional problem,' as one stated. Such responses became competent where sufficient supporting textual detail was provided. Other competent answers contrasted the Kellers with the Deevers, especially the relationships between the fathers and their children. Good answers focused more on Miller's dramatic exploration of these concerns, analysing ways in which the two families are 'deliberately contrasted by Miller to create layers of dramatic irony,' as one suggested. Very good work focused on specific details, such as Larry's army of brothers and the cleverness of the play revolving around him despite his absence, 'because of his loyalties, he gave his life for his father's crimes' as one suggested. Others saw Ann's difficulty as defining her loyalties – 'Ann desperately wants to start a family to make up for the one she abandoned', as one suggested. Some focused on George, whose 'loyalty to his father does not cause him to ignore the truth, but to seek it, as a contrast to Chris'. Where such interpretations were linked to analysis of specific dramatic methods such as the use of language and symbols the answers did well. Very good answers integrated telling contextual details, as well as specific appropriate quotation, to support such perceptive interpretations and often did very well.
- (b) This was a popular question, with nearly a third of the entry choosing this option. Most placed the passage in the context of the wider text, with nearly all answers showing at least some knowledge of the characters at this point in the play. Some very weak answers did not have the required knowledge, with insecurity about the relationships and the situation severely limiting the success of the essays. Limited answers tended to either paraphrase the passage, with some personal response to the characters, or retell Joe's 'story' and his relationship with Chris. The success of these essays often depended on the relevance of the supporting comments and the engagement shown in the personal response. Better answers were able to see the significance of the passage in terms of its context in the wider text, with many noting the irony of Joe's references to detectives and prison, 'which given what we find out about his past actions is dramatically shocking to the audience,' as one put it. More competent answers saw the ambivalence of Joe's relationship with Bert, with a typical response being: 'Is Joe really just a good guy who likes kids, or is he using Bert to make sure his reputation is not under threat?' Good answers developed such personal insights by close reference to the detail of the passage: the references to law and order and police work, the easy-going, physical relationship between Joe and Bert, the effect of having Chris on-looking throughout and the 'references to the hunting or arresting gun, which of course later Joe uses to kill himself,' as one noted. Very good answers saw how Miller used the exchanges here to develop Joe's characterisation, his relationship with Chris and some of the key themes such as of law and order and relationships between adults and children (especially fathers and sons). Some answers explored the language and the action in close detail, noting for example the 'tone of suppressed violence in Chris's final words,' as one put it or 'Chris's final words are an ironic foreshadowing that the kids (Deevers and him) will come for him'. Where such interpretations were lifted by apt reference to the wider text and to relevant contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

This was a popular choice overall, with about one third of the entry choosing this text, of which the majority offered the passage (b) option.

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material to discuss, with many learners able to range throughout the text with knowledge. Popular discussion points were the separate gullings of Beatrice and Benedick, the 'supposed spying on the immoral Hero,' as one put it, and the role of Borachio (and through him Don John) as a 'spy in Don Pedro's court,' as one suggested. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of these events or the underlying relationships. Where some attention was paid to the drama Shakespeare created by these means, the answers started to become competent. Better answers focused clearly on the 'dramatic use', with some good personal responses seen to the 'comedy and tragedy created by spying, where often at least one of the characters misinterpreted the situation or was deliberately misled,' as one stated. Good answers

developed such ideas into a more thorough consideration of Shakespeare's 'social and moral concerns throughout the play,' as one suggested. Others focused on what these events revealed about the attitudes to and the treatment of women, for example, for 'despite the comedic thread, the great deception of Hero looms over the plot, keeping the audience engaged in its resolution,' as one noted. Very good answers were able to support arguments with apposite quotation from the text, often analysing the use of language and tone, so that, for some learners, 'spying was accompanied by the language of deception and a tone of mistrust, so that even the comic, almost slapstick, moments were given a darker effect for the audience,' as one put it. Where such answers were supported by appropriate contexts they often did very well.

- (b) The passage was a more popular choice on this text and most responses were able to find relevant points to make about the different lovers. The dramatic context was important for this passage, coming as it does from the masked ball and those not recognising this tended to have difficulty following the dialogue, which often limited the development of any argument. Very weak answers struggled with even the basic situation and the relationships between the various groups of characters, inevitably limiting the success of any points made. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the various relationships, sometimes in great detail, though often not referring closely enough to the passage itself. Success at this level was often determined by how closely the learner explored the actual passage. More competent responses were able to discuss the various lovers and their relationships, with many speculating about whether Beatrice and Benedick had actually recognised each other, often offering interesting alternative interpretations. Others noted Claudio's reactions, 'a clear foreshadowing of his readiness to believe the worst, even about his adored Hero,' as one put it. Such interpretations were lifted by some consideration of 'Shakespeare's presentation,' with many exploring the language and the action in detail, noting, for example, 'the gentle mockery of Beatrice and Benedick's words, contrasted with the reproachful, self-interest on Claudio's soliloquy,' as one said. His speech is 'overly-dramatic and long-winded, making him pompous and self-righteous, compared to Benedick,' as another noted. Very good answers kept the question clearly in mind, exploring details with perception and discussing what they revealed about Shakespeare's methods of characterisation and the significance of them to the play as a whole. One noted 'Beatrice's "I would he had boarded me" as a clear example of her true affection for Benedick,' whereas others identified how 'Don John clearly sees others in love as a sign of their weakness and therefore an opportunity to make mischief, a key factor for his more serious interventions later in the play.' Where such interpretations were supported by close analysis of the passage and an awareness of the relevant textual contexts, the responses often did very well.

Question 3

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

This text was minority choice, with most takers opting for the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question. Weak answers tended to retell the stories of the women, particularly Amope and Rebecca, often in great detail. Success at this level was determined by the relevance of the supporting personal response and the understanding of Soyinka's concerns that was revealed in any commentary. Better answers considered how the women independently influenced the action of the plays and were 'used to develop the characters of the men around them,' as one suggested. Some responses focused on Amope and Chume, noting how his attitude to her changes and the consequent effect on his relationship with Jero. Others discussed Rebecca, noting Jero's evident attraction to her but also, 'how he uses her and her appeal to wrong foot others, such as officials and prophets, so that he can take advantage of them,' as one suggested. Good answers were able to develop such ideas into considering Soyinka's concerns in more detail, often his portrayal of male/female relationships, attitudes to sex and violence, with some exploring how these concerns are used as a means of characterisation of the prophets, for example, and also to develop the plot. One learner for example noted, 'How Jero watches one young woman going bathing and the audience sees how he controls himself in order to focus on his political ambitions,' whereas others noted how 'Amope's reaction to other women is as aggressive and violent as her husband's is to her.' Where such arguments were supported by close reference to the text or appropriate quotation, the answers often did very well.
- (b) Most responses were broadly aware of the context, though few were able to place this exchange precisely. Weak answers tended to either summarise the passage or to retell details of the prophets' behaviour and actions. Better answers at this level were able to shape their ideas to the task and offer some personal response on how Soyinka 'mocks the idea of religion,' and ridicules

its leaders here, 'who are either pompous, drunk, lascivious or light-fingered,' as one suggested. Competent responses explored the different types of comedy, 'verbal, visual and physical,' as one noted, 'but always undermining the role of these religious leaders.' Good answers developed their arguments by referring closely to the dramatic methods, often contrasting the language of the various characters and considering what the effects on the audience might be. Good answers also considered how different audiences might respond. 'Some would be appalled at Soyinka's presentation of the hypocritical, coarse prophets,' as one thought, whereas others were alive to 'the rich comedy of the interactions between these charlatans, well managed by the cool and beautiful Rebecca.' Very good answers considered the language in detail, contrasting Shadrach's educated self-importance with the coarse vulgarity of Ananias and Caleb, for example. Others saw how 'the playwright uses them as comedy instruments of satire for the audience', or explored them as 'shameless hypocrites where Soyinka's parody combines humour with reality to keep the play universal', as another argued. Where such arguments were supported by analysis of specific moments from the passage, the answers often did very well.

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were not enough 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 minority choice in this session, with most of the answers opting for the passage (b) question.

- (a) Nearly all answers were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Popular choices were *Women and Roses*, *Pictor Ignatus*, *The Laboratory* and *Meeting at Night*. Some weaker answers tended to range more widely through selection to find examples of symbols, without focusing in sufficient detail on two poems. Other weak answers summarised or paraphrased their chosen poems; in these cases, success was determined by the relevance of the supporting personal response and the level of understanding shown in the occasional comments. Better answers were able to explore their chosen poems in detail, often showing secure knowledge of meaning and clear understanding of Browning's concerns, with many noting how he 'chooses symbols to create impressions in his readers, such as roses for women and rocks or night-time for difficulties in relationships,' as one noted. Better answers explored the symbols in the context of other poetic methods such as verse form and language, with some learners offering sensitive analyses of the possible effects on the reader. For example, in the case of *Porphyria*, 'the environment symbolises the emotion of the male, showing insecurities and the Speaker's imbalance,' as one argued. Very good answers were able to develop such ideas into a detailed comparison of the meaning and effects of their chosen poems. Where such interpretations were supported by appropriate contexts and precise quotation from the poems, the answers often did very well.
- (b) This was a relatively popular choice in this session, the second most popular question in **Section B**. Most answers were able to explore the poem with some knowledge and understanding. Very weak answers, however, were often puzzled by the situation in the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with consequent weaknesses in understanding and the discussion. Answers in the lower levels of assessment often attempted a paraphrase of the poem, with some recognising how the man is 'coming to terms with losing his lover and trying desperately to hold it all together,' as one suggested. Other weaker answers did show knowledge of the meaning of the poem and were able to support their comments with some relevant personal response, though this was more successful where the personal response was linked to the meaning and effects of the poem. Better answers considered some of the details of language and poetic voice and what they revealed about the speaker's feelings, with some linking this poem to Browning's dramatic monologues and exploring the drama of the situation in this poem, often effectively. Good answers analysed some of the effects of the language – the 'resigned and yet affectionate mood that Browning creates,' for some, whereas others 'felt the deep emotion and sense of loss created by details such as his asking to hold her hand and then keeping it longer than he should.' Other good answers explored the 'reported dialogue and how he neatly shapes this to

the poetic structures,' as one suggested, so that the 'tone is sombre, the pace deliberately slow,' as one stated. There was good exploration of Browning's use of rhyme, with many noting how 'they landed on emotive words such as "bitter", "black" and "longer" to reinforce the speaker's repressed emotions,' as one said. Very good answers were able to support such interpretations with appropriate context and specific reference to the set poem. Only a very few answers were able to discuss other poetic methods confidently, but those that did explore the verse form in detail and the rhythms often did very well.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was a minority choice of text in **Section B**, most learners choosing the passage **(b)** question, with only a very few responses to option **(a)**.

- (a)** Nearly all answers were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Popular choices were *Mametz Wood*, *Keyways*, *Happy Accidents* and *Liability to Floods*. Weaker answers often had some relevant knowledge of their chosen poems and at times understanding of Sheers's concerns. Answers at this level often paraphrased the content of the poems, with some personal response and occasional comments on language. More competent answers had a sound understanding of the concerns and meaning of the poems and were able to shape their essays to consider how Sheers was 'exploring conflict'. Some essays considered more violent conflict such as war or the physical threat of the poetic characters, such as the fishmonger or Dr Hunzvi. Others however explored 'the emotional conflict that comes from the way Sheers portrays his relationships in such graphic detail,' as one suggested. Good answers looked closely at some of his poetic methods, particularly his use of imagery and language, 'often violent and threatening even in his 'nature' poems such as *Y Gaer* where the "rain's beating" and "the hail's pepper shot" attack the grieving father,' as one stated. Such ideas were developed by very good answers into a consideration of the effects of these choices, as well as exploring other poetic methods such as rhythm and verse form. Answers which developed these interpretations with contextual points often did very well.
- (b)** This was a popular question in **Section B**, with many good responses. Nearly every answer showed knowledge of the basic meaning of this extract from *Amazon*, though there were some very weak responses which struggled with some of the details – for example, apparently unaware of the woman's struggle with cancer – resulting in some uneven commentaries. Weak answers often paraphrased this extract, with the supporting comments or personal response dictating the success of the essay. More competent responses showed clear knowledge of the whole poem and often sympathetic understanding of the woman's situation. Better answers considered some of the poetic methods, with some good analysis of the language and Sheers's use of symbols, most commonly the Amazon references, lifting some answers into the higher levels of assessment. Very good answers focused on the effects of the poetic methods identified, such as the 'shifting of the focus from the woman's inner voice to her family and back again,' as one suggested. Others saw it as 'presenting feminine power and independence – a noticeable, overarching theme of the collection' and the persona as 'using her disadvantage as an advantage,' as one put it. Others had a sensitive appreciation of the subtleties of some of the details, such as 'the emotional opening of the saved bottle of champagne,' or for others the 'focus on the woman's physical response to the loss of breast,' or 'the final water image is very powerful – she found cancer in the shower so reclaims the water and her body at the same time,' with such analyses leading to insightful interpretations. Responses which referred to the effects of such specific moments in the poem, especially when supported by some awareness of the literary and biographical contexts, often did very well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with nearly three quarters of the learners choosing this text and all but a very few of those offering the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** Nearly every answer was able to select relevant poems to discuss, the most popular choices being Owen's *Futility*, Browning's *If Thou Must Love Me*, Wroth's *Song*, Browning's *The Cry of the Children* and Byron's *Darkness*. Weaker answers had knowledge of relevant poems but were often

limited in understanding of the poetic concerns, so that the discussion often only implicitly linked the poems. Better answers at this level often gave detailed summaries of the selected poems and were able to compare them in terms of content and personal response. Where such responses considered the causes of regret such as loyalty, loss or love, the answers started to become competent. Other sound answers tended to show understanding of the concerns and were able to offer a relevant commentary, though treating each poem separately with a summative conclusion. Better answers explored the poetic methods, often the language and the imagery, through specific reference to the text, in some cases showing how the different poets used these methods to present different types of regret. Good answers always focused closely on the details of the writing, exploring how the different choices of form, rhythm and rhyme, as well as language and imagery, enable the poets to create effects, often integrating their ideas about each poem into the structure of their essay. Very good responses developed such points into sophisticated interpretations of the poets' concerns, often selecting apt quotations and embedding a telling use of appropriate contexts into their arguments.

- (b) This was the most popular (b) question from **Section B** on the paper with over two thirds of the entry choosing this option. Very weak answers often struggled to show relevant knowledge, with some assuming the speaker to be a woman for example and others discussing the poem apparently as an unseen with limited grasp of the meaning. Better answers at this level tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer an overall summary with some generally relevant personal response on, 'the desire to stop time when we are in love,' as one put it. Sounder answers were able to show understanding of Shakespeare's concerns, often focusing on time, love and the power of poetry, with some showing an awareness of some of the poetic methods, particularly language and imagery, though some were puzzled by 'Shakespeare's use of archaic language,' as one put it. Good answers explored the effects of the language and the underlying personification of time, where 'the dramatic device of talking to Time enables Shakespeare to describe its power at the same time as challenging it,' as one said. Other good answers considered the poetic voice, with some noting that, 'though on the surface talking to time, he is in fact addressing his lover,' whilst others noted that all the 'impossible things mentioned in fact do come to pass eventually, so that his prediction of immortality in verse sounds more plausible.' Very good answers considered the poetic form, the use of the sonnet structure and the rhyming pattern, all in the context of the meaning of the poem and its intended effects. Where such analyses were supported by appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a minority choice this session, with nearly every learner choosing the passage (b) question.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, with most learners able to select some relevant poems to discuss. Popular choices were *Catrin*, *Death of a Cat*, *February*, *Scything*, *Seal* and *White Roses*. Weaker answers retold the 'stories' of their chosen poems, often in detail and showing some knowledge of meaning. Better answers at this level started to show understanding of Clarke's concerns, with some shaping of ideas to the given task, 'feelings of loss'. Some more competent responses identified different kinds of loss and chose poems which enabled a wide-ranging interpretation. 'Loss of life, or children or hope are all part of Clarke's typical topics,' as one suggested. Other sound responses considered some poetic methods, most usually language and imagery, with some well-focused analyses of Clarke's use of for example roses, animals and nature generally. Good answers looked at the effects of her choices, how she 'creates a mood of melancholy or even tension in her writing,' as one put it, with a few learners able to appreciate other poetic methods such as her choice of verse form and use of rhythm. Where such interpretations were supported by appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.
- (b) Most answers had some knowledge of the poem and were able to discuss its meaning. Weak answers tended to summarise the poem, showing some knowledge, but often very limited understanding of Clarke's concerns. Better answers at this level did have some personal response to share and were at least partly aware of the two responses to climbing the mountain. Sounder answers were aware of Clarke's concerns, particularly how 'humans respond to nature and dangerous situations,' as one suggested and were able to explore how she reveals them in this poem. More competent answers analysed how she links the act of climbing to her writing, 'the subtle use of the word "page", showing how the climber's exhilaration and facing danger is repeated in the way she writes her poems,' as one put it. Good answers explored the language and

the imagery in detail, her use of the symbols of nature such as the Lake and the mountain itself. More sophisticated response considered other poetic methods – her use of stanza form, rhythms and enjambement were often well analysed at this level. Where such discussions were aware of different layers of meaning and had some contextual insights to share, the answers often did very well.

Section C Prose

Question 9

E M Forster: *Howard's End*

This was a minority choice **Section C** text with most takers offering the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) There were only a few responses seen to this question. Weak answers struggled with the concept of 'rural England' and interpreted it as merry England in order to discuss issues of class and gender, often only tangentially linked to the question. Better answers saw that Forster 'uses Howard's End the property as a symbol for a more rural England', and there was at times some discussion of city life versus country life. Some developed this argument with one response arguing that Forster's presentation suggested 'a multitude of concomitant factors shaping the landscape of rural England – class, wealth and gender'.

Few answers were able to explore Forster's methods in any detail, but those who did and were able to support their comments with specific reference from the text often did well.

- (b) The extract was the more popular choice, with most responses offering at least a brief contextualisation of the passage in terms of the wider text. Weak answers tended to be distracted into retelling the history of the relationship between Margaret and Mrs Wilcox, with a consequent lack of focus on the task and the passage. Better answers saw the significance of the house, with nearly all candidates seeing that 'Mrs Wilcox had disinherited them,' as one suggested. Discussions at this level were often focused on the various characters, with some interesting personal response emerging. Some saw the 'patriarchal and supercilious' tone of the men who are 'vexed at Dolly, looking to include herself in the discussion,' as one noted. Good answers saw some of the contrasts and connections: 'Mrs Wilcox sees Margaret as her spiritual successor because she sees Howard's End based on its spiritual, not monetary value,' as one put it. Other responses thought the family, by contrast 'see HE as an asset,' noting that Forster 'describes them as pragmatic, materialistic and unable to deal with anything abstract or involving emotions'. Answers which deconstructed the dynamics of the family relationships often did well, especially where there was a clear focus on Forster's methods, such as dialogue and his use of language. Where these answers were supported by appropriate use of contexts, they did well.

Question 10

ANDREA LEVY: *Small Island*

This was a popular choice in **Section C** with the majority choosing the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) Nearly all responses were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weak answers tended to retell the various stories of those characters they felt either had changed or were the victims of changing social attitudes, with Queenie, Bernard, Gilbert and Hortense as the almost exclusive focus points. Better answers saw the structure as the means to present the changing values, so the 2 time-frames were juxtaposed, lots of character development discussed, especially Queenie. Competent answers were able to discuss the various settings, such as Queenie's house, which 'was filled with different attitudes once Bernard came back,' as one noted. Others compared the races such as 'the US and British servicemen, which showed that Britain was not perhaps more open to change,' as one put it. Good answers explored the experiences, noting for example that 'the Jamaicans did not receive a motherly welcome from their mother country,' as one put it. Good answers discussed Levy's wider themes: expectation versus reality, Imperialism and Colonialism were all popular choices. Very good answers looked at the effect of Levy's choices. For some 'the switching narratives serve to show naivety at the beginning and changing attitudes at the end', so that even 'Hortense does not escape criticism, she's also guilty of racism and snobbery and has to change her social attitudes,' as one suggested, though most thought that only Gilbert stays true to himself and that Queenie withstands discrimination herself and her

perspective entirely shifts through 'her growing knowledge and deteriorating ignorance,' as one put it. Where such interpretations were supported by specific quotation and some awareness of the relevant contexts, the answers did very well.

- (b) The (b) question was more popular. Most answers were able to place the passage at least in general terms. Weak answers tended either to paraphrase the content with little awareness of the underlying methods or to retell the narrative of Hortense's training to be a teacher and her subsequent disappointments. Better answers saw how this narrative by Hortense serves to develop her character in the reader's mind, some noting how 'Hortense is drawn in by the ideals she holds in high regard- grace and elegance- presented as manly in nature' and that she 'was prejudice toward the Principal because she judged her based on appearance,' as one noted. Other good answers explored the language and imagery: 'The Principal is a terrifying force capable of controlling nature given that Levy describes the candidates as animals and the Principal as zoo-keeper'. Some saw the 'comic relief' the extract brought, whilst others contextualised it – 'what colonial citizens are taught about manners and English culture is not actually something practised in Britain'. Good responses saw the effects in terms of the novel's main concerns: 'The Principal symbolises both the mother country and Hortense's aspirations- she's in disguise, as is the mother country,' as one put it. Such interpretations, where supported by specific textual references, did very well.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a minority choice in this session.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Nearly every response was able to place the passage in at least a broad textual context. Weak answers tended to paraphrase the passage or more commonly retell the rest of the story often in great detail. Better answers saw that the letter form 'creates intimacy and connection' and is a 'straightforward telling- almost unaware of how traumatic the history was,' as one suggested. For others the extract 'recalls the events not the feelings, so it's up to the events to evoke something in the reader,' whilst some noted how the mother's 'newfound pride and cultural appreciation' is juxtaposed with the son, who is 'what gave her empty past meaning,' as one noted. Good answers considered the style in detail, some noting that 'with its short, unemotional sentences it is acting as a desperate last plea to be understood, as one suggested. Others looked at the tone – the letter is one 'of hurt and pain' and its 'anguished questions show that her past becomes a perverted, darker version of her future,' as one stated. Very good answers explored the concerns and the methods, keeping the letter form in mind throughout. Where these interpretations were supported by precise quotations and an awareness of the contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 12

*NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: **Petals of Blood***

This was a minority choice in this session with about an equal balance between the two options.

- (b) Nearly every answer was able to select some relevant material with which to answer the question. Weaker responses were able to summarise more or less relevant events in the book, with slightly better answers at this level shaping their choices to suit the three elements of the 'trinity'. Better answers saw the trilogy as a 'means of enforcing oppression and colonialism', or as a 'compilation of the themes of religion, money, colonization and violence,' as one suggested. For nearly every answer they were at least 'a type of oppression and force'. Very good work offered detailed analysis of religion and money as 'twin oppressors whilst violence could be a source of liberation, despite that violence and force have negative impacts,' as one argued. For others, Ngũgĩ was concerned to give a warning that 'violence begins as a form of freedom and leads to a form of oppression'. Very good answers looked closely at the methods and their effects. For some 'there were parallels with Munira's cult-like dedication to God', whereas others explored them as 'symbols of brutality'. Other candidates saw them as positive, especially in discussions of the Bible as both a 'means for achieving inequality and equality'. Very good answers also often supported their points with some context so that 'Ngũgĩ is critical of the westernisation of the African economy, with

money as the monster destroying traditional values,' as one put it. Such answers combining textual and contextual knowledge with some sharp analysis of methods always did well.

- (c) Most answers had some awareness of the context to the passage. Weak answers tended to focus on Munira's story, with some at this level able to see how this episode starts to shape the reader's view of him. Better answers saw the significance in its 'focus on disturbing, unanswerable questions from the children,' as one suggested. Good answers saw the aligning of characters in nature and many saw the lesson as 'signifying exactly and foreshadowing the main storyline and meaning of the novel', because 'Ngũgĩ brings forth the complexity of Munira's character in the passage' and the tragedy of the lesson as 'the flower raises questions that Munira can not answer'. Very good answers explored the style in detail, noting the use of dialogue, the way the children 'in their simplicity reveal the weakness in Munira's own education and understanding,' as one noted. For other good answers though, 'the worm-eaten flower was a symbol for and a representative of the poor of Kenya and even the country as a whole,' as one suggested. Where such ideas were supported by appropriate quotation and contextual points, the answers did well.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

1. Essays should always have a clear and appropriate structure on which to build the arguments.
2. Option **(b)** passage questions may usefully place the passage in the wider text as a relevant context.

General comments

The general standard was satisfactory with the large majority of learners showing at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a few rubric errors in this session with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are encouraged to ensure that all learners know what is expected of them before they sit the exam. Very few responses showed evidence of mismanagement of time in this session. The quality of expression was sound in nearly every case, although there are some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all the texts on the paper and answers reflecting a wide range of performance were seen on each of the texts attempted by the learners, with the most popular choices being *All My Sons* in **Section A** and the selection from *Songs of Ourselves* in **Section B**.

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

1. Assessment Objective 4 from the Literature in English syllabus states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. The overall success of many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would be improved by the essay having a clear structure. This should always include an introduction, which sets out the learner's approach to the given task, followed by a series of interlinked and developing paragraphs, culminating in an appropriate summative concluding paragraph. Such a framework would add a useful sense of direction to essays which otherwise become repetitive and unfocused.
2. Candidates responding to option **(b)** passage questions, who briefly place the passage within the wider work it is selected from, provide valuable textual context. Appropriate contexts may vary according to the type of question being answered. This equally applies to essays on poetry passages, where the appropriate context might be how typical or otherwise the set poem or extract from a poem is of the poet generally, with perhaps brief supporting references to the wider text. Other types of context such as historical or biographical are also very useful, but learners should be encouraged to explore intra-textual contexts as a useful way of showing appropriate knowledge of the whole text.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ARTHUR MILLER: *All My Sons*

This was the second most popular drama text on this paper with a third of the entry offering responses, of which the great majority chose the passage **(b)** option.



- (a) Almost every response had sufficient knowledge of the text with which to address the task. The main focus of almost every essay was Joe Keller and his family, though many answers did also discuss the Deever family as well. Weaker answers tended to retell the Keller family history, often with good detail and some relevant personal response, such as 'I find the hypocrisy of Joe and Kate, pretending to be the perfect family, despite what they have done, very upsetting,' as one put it. Better answers at this level showed some understanding of Miller's concerns which added focus to the narrative summaries, with many speculating on whether Miller 'believes that Joe's eventual suicide is real justice for him,' as one stated. Others considered what justice in the context of the play might be: 'Losing his life or losing both of his sons,' one suggested. More competent answers linked justice to other concerns, attitudes to money and relationships, for example, with many referring appropriately to the American dream in the post-war period, as a useful contextualisation of the issues. Good answers looked in detail at the methods and their effects, particularly the language and the contrasting relationships, where, for some learners, the role of Anne was significant: 'her apparently easy switch from Larry to Chris, whilst keeping the truth of Larry's fate secret, makes justice for her seem questionable,' as one put it. Other good answers contrasted the outcomes for Steve and Joe, and through them their children, with some good analysis of the dramatic methods, 'how Miller sets Steve's actual prison against Joe's pretend prison in the basement and his mental prison, which gradually reveals itself,' as one suggested. Very good responses were alive to the dramatic tensions created as the 'lack of real justice is revealed by the intervention of George,' as one said, as well as the way 'Miller gradually reveals the awful truth to a horrified audience.' Where such interpretations were supported by precise and relevant quotation the answers often did very well.
- (b) This was a popular question with nearly a quarter of the entry choosing this option. Most placed the passage in the context of the wider text, with nearly all answers showing at least some knowledge of the characters at this point in the play. Some very weak answers did not have the required knowledge and were unsure of the roles of Anne and Larry for example, with a consequent lack of understanding of the play's concerns. Better answers at this level were able to explore the stories of the various relationships and offer some personal response relevant to the given task, family tensions. When narrative summaries were supported by some understanding of Miller's concerns such as guilt, love and loyalty and an awareness of the underlying 'deceptions held inside by so many of the characters,' as one put it, the answers became increasingly competent. Other sound answers focused on the relationship between Joe and Chris, 'who though father and son seem to be very different in their personalities,' as one put it. Others explored 'the tensions around Anne, Kate and the factory which even now father and son are not honest about,' as one suggested. Good answers developed such interpretations by looking at Miller's dramatic presentation – the use of dialogue, stage directions, the specific language chosen for each Joe and Chris at this point in the play were often well analysed. For example, 'Joe's "ignoring" what he can not face, already signalled by his only reading the back page of his paper, foreshadows how he is bit by bit forced to face up to his deceit,' as one suggested. Very good answers considered the effects of the language and the various revelations in this scene, such as 'Joe's obsession with the factory and passing it on to Chris, who, well aware of this, uses it to manipulate his dad into helping him get what he really wants – Anne, his brother's girl-friend,' as one put it. Where such insights were supported by an awareness of context and the dramatic situation before the audience, the answers did very well.

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Much Ado About Nothing*

This was the most popular choice of text overall, with two thirds of the entry choosing this text, of which the large majority offered the passage (b) option.

- (a) Nearly every response was able to select relevant material to discuss, with many learners able to range throughout the text with knowledge. Popular discussion points were the lovers' conflicts, especially the verbal jousting between Beatrice and Benedick and the 'more damaging and savage attacks on Hero by Claudio,' as one put it. Many other responses also considered other relationship conflicts, such as between Don John and Don Pedro, Benedick and Claudio and Dogberry and Conrade. Weak answers tended to retell the story of their chosen 'conflicts', often with some engaged personal response and at times some understanding of the underlying concerns, as 'conflict in the play is often to do with reputation, jealousy, attitudes to sex and social differences,' as one neatly put it. Sounder answers developed such ideas into considering other kinds of conflict as well, especially Benedick and Beatrice's internal dialogues about each other and 'the conflicted

loyalties which trouble so many of the characters – Benedick caught between Beatrice and Claudio or Don Pedro between being a ruler and a friend, for example,’ as one suggested. Good answers looked at Shakespeare’s presentation of these various conflicts – language and imagery were often well discussed. For example, ‘Beatrice’s use of animal imagery to display her hostility to men in general and Benedick in particular,’ as one noted, with others analysing Don John’s ‘use of dark and melancholy language to display his conflict with the world around him,’ for example. These interpretations became very good where they were developed into considering other dramatic methods – Shakespeare’s use of contrasts or the various comic moments in the play, for example. Other very good essays focused on the effects of the various kinds of conflict on the audience, noting that ‘though much of the verbal and physical comedy, in the gulling scenes for example, makes the audience laugh, the violent language and aggressive misogyny of such as Claudio would have a much darker effect on them.’ Where such sophisticated arguments were supported by appropriate contexts and specific textual support, the answers did very well indeed.

- (b) The passage was the most popular choice on the paper and most responses were able to find relevant points to make about the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick. Very weak answers struggled with even the basic situation of the relationship and the characters, inevitably limiting the success of any points made. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of the relationship, sometimes in great detail, though often not referring closely enough to the passage itself. Success at this level was often determined by how much the learner did refer to the actual passage and the occasional supporting comments. Some answers at this level were able to offer some engaged personal response and, as more attention was paid to the concerns discussed in the passage, so the answers became more convincing. Better answers were alive to the context and considered what an audience learns about the relationship in this, the first on-stage meeting of the couple. Many noted that ‘they only seem to have eyes for each other and though Beatrice says, “nobody marks” him, she evidently is.’ Others argued for a previous attachment between them (‘I know you of old’) which ‘perhaps had ended bitterly because they could not commit,’ as one suggested. More competent answers developed through exploring other aspects of the dramatic situation, the public nature of their exchange and the need ‘to keep up appearances’ as one put it. Others explored the language noting the use of animal imagery ‘in the cut and thrust of their witty exchanges,’ as one noted. Good answers considered other dramatic techniques – the staging of the scene, Leonato’s teasing of Benedick and the pace of the dialogue were all well analysed, sometimes in terms of their potential comic effects. Where essays developed into considering the effects of the dramatic choices Shakespeare makes, especially when supported by relevant quotation, the answers often did very well.

Question 3

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

There were not enough responses to this text to be able to make a general comment on performance.

Question 4

THOMAS MIDDLETON AND WILLIAM ROWLEY: *The Changeling*

There were not enough 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 the least popular **Section B** text in this session, with most of the answers opting for the passage (b) question.

- (a) There were only a few takers for this question. Nearly all answers were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Popular choices of poems were *The Bishop Orders His Tomb at St Praxed’s Church*, *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, *The Confessional* and *Confessions*. Weak answers summarised or paraphrased their chosen poems, and their success was determined by the relevance of the supporting personal response, though there were occasional comments which suggested some understanding of Browning’s concerns. Better answers were

able to explore their chosen poems in detail, often showing secure knowledge of meaning and clear understanding of Browning's concerns, with many noting how he 'satirises the pomp and hypocrisy of the Catholic church but has nothing positive to say about the people or their beliefs,' as one noted. Sounder answers looked at the presentation of the concerns, with many analysing at least some elements of his use of dramatic monologue. Nearly every answer at this level was aware of language and to some extent the 'mocking tone, which was often created by what Browning does not say,' as one noted. Only good answers were confident in exploring his use of rhythm and poetic form, with some contrasting the stanzas of *Soliloquy* with the more narrative form of *The Bishop*, for example. Very good answers focused on the 'presentation' and were often able to explore the imagery and the 'uncomfortable language of wealth or hate that the characters use,' as one said, with perception and insight. Where these essays included appropriate support from the text and some specific relevant context, they did very well indeed.

- (b) This was a popular choice in this session, the second most popular **Section B** question. Most answers were able to explore the poem with some knowledge and understanding. Very weak answers, however, were often puzzled by the situation in the poem and appeared to be responding as to an unseen poem, with consequent weaknesses in understanding and the discussion. Answers in the lower levels of assessment often attempted a paraphrase of the poem, with some recognising the extended personification of the earth. Other weaker answers did show knowledge of the meaning of the poem and were able to support their comments with some relevant personal response, though this was more successful where the personal response was linked to the meaning and effects of the poem. Better answers considered some of the details of language and poetic voice and what they revealed about Browning's use of nature. Good answers analysed some of the effects of the language and the imagery, with confident interpretations exploring his 'belief in the power of nature and the position of man in the universe,' as one put it. His presentation of 'low nature is not only verbal, but also rhythmic, echoing the ripples and the relaxed atmosphere in the flow of the lines,' as one suggested. Where such ideas developed into considering the effects on the reader the essays did well, especially when they were able to discuss other poetic methods confidently.

Question 6

OWEN SHEERS: *Skirrid Hill*

This was the second most popular choice of text in **Section B**, with most learners choosing the passage (b) question, with only a few responses to option (a).

- (a) Nearly all answers were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Popular choices were ranged from across the collection, though *Amazon*, *The Farrier*, *Flag* and *Skirrid Fawr* were among the most popular. Weaker answers often had some relevant knowledge of their chosen poems and at times some understanding of Sheers's concerns. Answers at this level often explained the symbols in terms of the poem's narrative, with some personal response and occasional comments on language. More competent answers had a sound understanding of the concerns and meaning of the poems and were able to shape their essays to consider how Sheers was using various symbols in subtle and sensitive ways. For example, 'even the title of *Skirrid Fawr* is symbolic of unity, being a mixture of English (*Skirrid*) and Welsh (*Fawr*),' as one essay pointed out. Other competent answers often linked the symbols to various of his concerns, so that the 'flag' was at once a symbol of Welsh history and pride but also 'in its degenerated state a symbol of the decline of Wales,' as one put it. Good answers looked closely at some of his poetic methods, particularly his use of 'imagery and language to explore deeper meanings such as the symbol of the horse and the way the Farrier is described almost like a romantic lover in order to make the reader see the relationship in a different way,' as one stated. Very good answers explored the poetic methods, so that 'his use of tercets itself symbolises the stubborn continuance of doing things in the old way,' as one suggested, though for others 'they were a celebration of Welsh culture and history.' Such ideas were developed by very good answers into a consideration of the effects of these choices and, where supported by relevant quotation the responses did very well as did answers which developed these interpretations with appropriate contextual support.
- (b) This was a popular question in **Section B**, with many good responses. Nearly every answer showed knowledge of the basic meaning of *The Farrier*, though there were a few very weak responses which struggled with some of the details, such as the fact the farrier is putting new shoes on the horse, resulting in some uneven details. Weak answers retold the 'story' of the poem, with the supporting comments or personal response dictating the success of the essay, though

nearly every response was aware of the way 'Sheer's describes the man and the horse as though they were lovers,' as one put it. More competent answers used their knowledge of the text to show understanding of the concerns here – man and nature, work, and relationships were commonly identified – and in the wider text. Good answers explored the language and imagery, analysing the use of the 'romantic imagery' and how Sheers 'chooses words like "smells", "slap", "bride" to show the male dominance of females and humans of nature,' as one put it. Others explored the language of 'masculinity, such as the roll-up, putting his shoulder in, the sound of his steel, all of which help to show the farrier as working man,' as one said. Others though saw the sexual politics as the 'lexical field of femininity undermines the horse's power - though stronger than the man, she's diminished due to her gender,' as one suggested. Some very good answers looked at his use of verse form – many noting the historical context of the use of tercets, for example – and imagery which for some was 'strangely feminine, the bride and the seamstress seeming odd in this male dominated workplace,' as one suggested. Those essays which developed such astute analyses by selecting relevant literary and biographical contexts, often did very well.

Question 7

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with nearly half of the learners choosing this text and most of those offering the **(b)** passage option.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select more or less relevant poems to discuss, the most popular choices were wide ranging: Hood's *The Song of the Shirt*, Yeats's *When You Are Old*, Owen's *Futility*, Browning's *The Cry of the Children*, Shakespeare's *Sonnet 19* and Byron's *Darkness*. Weaker answers had knowledge of relevant poems but were often limited in understanding of the poetic concerns, with some struggling to shape their ideas to the task. Better answers at this level often gave detailed summaries of the selected poems and were able to show the presentation of fear in terms of content and personal response. Where such responses considered the causes of fear such as war, growing old, loss or love, the answers grew in competence. Other sound answers tended to show secure understanding of the concerns through their comments, though treating each poem separately with a summative conclusion. Better answers explored the poetic methods, often the language and the imagery, through specific reference to the text, in some cases showing how the different poets used these methods to present fear 'as something intangible and yet to the sufferer physically very real,' as one put it. Others though thought 'fear was often a result of some other issue, loss of love leading to a fear of being alone or forgotten,' as one noted. Many answers at this level were able to analyse the language and imagery, which 'are the most important tools for creating the intangible feelings of fear,' as one suggested. Where the analysis was fully supported by quotations and close textual references the answers reached the higher levels of assessment. Good answers explored other poetic choices too: choices of form, rhythm and rhyme. Where they showed how these 'tools, enable the poets to create effects,' the answers did well. Very good responses developed such points into sophisticated, structured interpretations of the poets' concerns, often embedding a telling use of appropriate contexts into their arguments.
- (b) This was the second most popular **(b)** question from **Section B** on the paper with over one third of the entry choosing this option. Very weak answers often struggled to show relevant knowledge. Better answers at this level tended to paraphrase the poem line by line or offer a general summary with some generally relevant personal response on 'how difficult it is to put up with betrayal by a lover,' as one put it. Sounder answers were able to show understanding of Dryden's concerns, disappointment, pain, betrayal, all being popular choices. More competent answers explored some of the methods, often language, with some noting 'the repetition of pain for love and life,' as one said. Others tracked the speaker's changing emotions, of 'anger, hurt, rage, despair and hopelessness,' as one put it. Good answers looked closely at poetic methods. Some noted the poetic voice, 'as Dryden takes on the persona of a woman trapped in a miserable relationship, thus affording a voice to the voiceless,' as one said. Others saw how the 'rigid structure of verse form and rhyme helped to capture the woman's feelings of helplessness and being trapped,' as one suggested. Very good answers always looked at the language closely and often analysed its effects, the 'use of words like pain, dying, injured, all help to convey the woman's sense of misfortune and yet are also have a slightly remote effect, as though Dryden is pretending an emotion he does not quite feel,' as one put it. Where such analyses were supported by appropriate contexts the answers did very well.

Question 8

GILLIAN CLARKE: Selected Poems

This was a relatively popular choice this session, with nearly every learner choosing the passage (b) question.

- (a) There were only a few responses to this question, with most learners able to select some relevant poems to discuss. Popular choices were *Cold Knap Lake*, *Neighbours*, *Climbing Cader Idris* and *White Roses*. Weaker answers retold the 'stories' of their chosen poems, often in detail and showing some knowledge of meaning. Better answers at this level started to show understanding of Clarke's concerns, with some shaping of ideas to the given task, 'people facing dangerous situations'. More competent answers were able to compare the types of danger and the people facing them, with some answers linking ideas to some of Clarke's other concerns, such as 'people in the natural world who often seem to be either in danger or dangerous,' as one noticed. Better answers tackled the word 'presents' by looking at language and imagery, often in detail and with some analysis. One noted for example how 'in *Climbing Cader Idris* her diction enables her to separate the two responses to the danger, one physical and one mental,' and with appropriate support such answers became proficient. Very good answers looked at other poetic methods, such as her use of rhythm and verse form, though these were disappointingly rare. Answers which developed into considering the effects of Clarke's poetic choices, especially where such interpretations were supported by appropriate contexts, did very well.
- (b) Most answers had some knowledge of the poem and were able to discuss its meaning. Some learners appeared to approach the poem as an unseen, misunderstanding the central relationship between the mother and her pup, with a consequent unevenness in the responses. Weak answers were able to summarise the poem, showing some knowledge, but often only a basic understanding of Clarke's concerns. More competent responses had a sound knowledge of the meaning of the poem and often a clear understanding of how the poem reflects some of Clarke's central concerns, such as 'motherliness and maternal angst,' as one suggested, as well as nature 'and what it teaches us about human behaviour,' as another learner suggested. Others noted the 'harshness of nature, as the basic instincts that drive the seal take over and the pup is abandoned to its own fate,' as one put it. Good answers inevitably explored the language and the imagery in detail, the 'personification of the experience by making the pup like a human baby in its "cot", waiting for its mother's milk,' as one noted. Others explored the use of detail: the colours as of the sea and the leaking milk were often considered, as was her use of imagery such as the thunder, the noose and the shawl. Where these analyses considered the effects of her choices the answers started to become very good. Some sophisticated responses considered other poetic methods as well – her use of stanza form, rhythms and enjambement were often well analysed at this level. Where such discussions were aware of different layers of meaning and had some contextual insights to share, the answers did very well.

Section C Prose

Question 9

E M Forster: *Howard's End*

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

Question 10

ANDREA LEVY: *Small Island*

This was a minority choice on this paper, with very few responses to the (b) question.

- (a) Nearly every answer was able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to retell the 'stories of some of the key characters,' as one put it. Popular choices were Gilbert, Hortense, Bernard and Queenie, whose narratives were often retold in great detail and with personal engagement. Answers which were able to support the narrative summaries with personal response often did better at this level. More competent answers saw how characters were often 'victims of different attitudes to race, often depending on where they were living,' as one

noted. Others compared for example the US and British military experiences of Gilbert, often again with personal engagement in his situation. Good answers explored the methods Levy employs. Different settings were well discussed, particularly Queenie's house, as was her use of 'comedy though often laced with an undertone of more sinister threat,' as one suggested. Bernard, for some, was a key figure, with 'his attitudes changing and developing throughout the book,' as one noted. Good answers considered Levy's methods of characterisation as a key element in her portrayal of attitudes to race, 'for, as readers, we see the effects of racism and some characters, how it changes them and their expectations, such as Hortense, but also how some characters like Bernard develop and become more complex in their responses to people different from them,' as one put it. Such interpretations, where supported by appropriate quotation and some sense of the appropriate contexts, often did very well.

- (b) Most responses were able to give at least a broad context to the passage. Weaker answers tended to retell the events that had led to this moment in the text and showed some knowledge of character and plot. Better answers at this level did focus on some of the detail and were able to explain the relationships here, with some showing awareness of how Levy creates 'Queenie's mood of excitement and adventure,' as one suggested. Such responses were often enlivened by relevant personal responses to both characters and the events. More competent answers focused on the concerns, typically showing understanding of the presentation of the war, the relationships and attitudes to family and women, through 'characters in the middle of unexpected events and therefore emotionally laid bare before us,' as one put it. Good answers explored the presentation in detail, most often analysing the language and the use of dialogue and the first-person narrator. Where such analyses were supported by apt quotation and relevant context the answers did well.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a popular text in this session, with over half of all learners choosing it, more or less evenly between the two options.

- (a) Just about every response was able to select relevant stories to address the task. Popular choices were *Gabriel-Ernest*, *The Lady's Maid's Bell*, *When It Happens* and *The Tower*. Weaker answers retold their selected stories often in great detail. Success at this level depended on how well the narratives were shaped to the text and the cogency of the supporting personal response. Comparison was usually implicit, though better answers at this level did offer a rudimentary structure in which each story was discussed separately followed by a concluding comparative paragraph. More competent answers selected relevant examples from their chosen stories, integrating the comparison into the flow of the argument. The more the responses focused on the 'ways' the more competent the answers became. Nearly every response at this level or beyond noted that characters were inevitably used 'to force the reader to appreciate the disturbing events that were happening,' as one noted. More confident answers also explored language and how writers 'use symbols such as the bell or the tower itself to present the unnaturalness of the story,' as one suggested. For some a key element was the final mystery – so that 'the reader is left puzzling what really happened to the maids or to the woman in the tower,' or as another suggested, 'what is not explained is more powerful than what is.' Such interpretations, supported by appropriate contexts and apposite quotation often did very well.
- (b) Most responses were able to give a broad context to the passage and show some knowledge of the story in general. Weaker answers tended to retell the story up to this point or offer a summary of the events of the given passage and what had preceded it. More competent answers did focus relationship, noting how Forna 'forces the reader to share in Attila's whirling emotions,' as one put it. More competent answers looked at Forna's methods and concerns closely, 'the use of telling detail such as the elderly person throwing crumbs,' or the use of dialogue and narrative to 'widen the range of emotions felt by the reader.' Very good answers explored the effects of such choices, especially how Forna uses language to 'gradually reveal the true situation and Attila's emotions,' as one suggested. Where such interpretations were supported by specific detail from the passage the answers did very well.

Question 12

NGŪGĨ WA THIONG'O: *Petals of Blood*

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