

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/11
Writing Paper 11

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** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, they should pay particular attention to key words which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for your *email to the editor* and to *give reasons to support your opinion*. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by 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.
- 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 not be overambitious in their choice of less common lexis, unless the precise meaning of the selected word is properly understood.
- 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 a few candidates failed to answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, comprising effective emails with an appropriately formal tone. These candidates gave a few clear reasons to support their opinion, often referring to quotations from the original imagined article. Weaker responses often lacked an appropriate tone and relied on anecdotal evidence.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on 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 mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were simply recounts of the content of the TV series, needing more in the way of critique or personal opinion; some responses to **Question 3** lacked a sense of drama or suspense; and some **Question 4** responses were repetitive and lacked variety and balance.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

You recently read a newspaper article which said that all zoos should be closed because they are bad for animals. You decide to write an email to the editor, in response to this article, giving your opinion.

- (a)** Write the text for your email, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, give reasons to support your opinion

Candidates generally engaged well with the question and many presented clear lines of argument. Many candidates wrote about how zoos save injured animals from the wild, preserve endangered species and contribute to the country's economy through employment and tourism. Most candidates recognised that there was a need to address the editor's assumed point of view, for example by engaging with the editor's 'outlandish claim' of zoos closing. However, the extent of that referencing was over emphasised in weaker responses, so much so that the candidate's own point of view never fully materialised. Form was an issue in many responses which lacked an appropriately formal tone for the audience (the editor of a newspaper).

Stronger responses demonstrated key conventions of formality and cited from the article to maintain focused arguments and developed ideas clearly, effectively adopting an appropriately formal register. A clear greeting and point of closure were evident across stronger responses, such as in this clear opening: 'I recently came across the article in your newspaper about closing zoos; as you clearly pointed out, the majority of animals in zoos have never and will never experience life beyond their habitat walls.' Many enthusiastic responses expressed genuine concern for the welfare of animals. These candidates organised their emails clearly in paragraphs, with each paragraph starting with a topic sentence, as in this example: 'Another benefit of zoos is that they are centres for learning. They are frequented by children learning about the different types of animals and provide them with positive experiences to absorb information about the world. Scientists also learn at zoos.'

Other stronger responses elaborated clearly on issues of concern, whilst also acknowledging how 'zoos provide a sanctuary for any potentially endangered species.' Stronger responses provided a range of supporting arguments in favour of zoos, such as animals being 'safe from predators' and how 'animals feel comfort and joy in interacting with humans. Many stronger responses demonstrated an ability to shape language for a desired effect. One very strong response closed with: 'They are not Orwellian hellscape, they are havens that provide a sanctuary to those in need.'

Often in weaker responses, candidates listed their reasons without explanation or exemplification. Frequently, candidates launched straight into their opinions without establishing any context for the email. They could not find an appropriate form of address, often starting with immature expressions like 'Dear Mr/Mrs Editor'. They showed little recognition of the email form or that they were responding to an article. Such responses sometimes demonstrated an ability to evoke a mood of

agitation, for example in expressions of outrage at animal abuse as well as towards blaming zoos, but explored ideas in a limited manner. For example: 'Second of all, where is your evidence and where did you get your information from? You definitely did not get it from the zoo.'

Weaker responses were often repetitive and limited in scope. Many weaker emails were short, often under 200 words, and therefore lacking in development of ideas. Many weaker responses were in need of structure, often lacking in paragraph breaks. Other weaker emails displayed a lack of control of basic punctuation and grammar, which hindered, sometimes severely, clarity of communication. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Animals are beautiful creatures that roam around this earth, why should they be locked in confined spaces like a prisoner. Imagine the life of a tiger, not being able to run and use their instincts they were born with. Cooped up in a cage being agitated buy guests.'

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

This question was answered poorly by the majority of candidates. One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answers and explaining the effect on the audience. However, most responses were in need of detail and evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

Most of the few stronger responses approached this task in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure, going through the content of the email and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and pathos, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave examples and attempted to analyse how stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, for example: 'I used pathos based on certain instances such as the joy zoos create for children, in order to create my emotional appeal. The use of ethos-based arguments, such as referring to scientific studies, allowed for my argument's credibility to increase.'

The few stronger responses employed a reflective tone, which showed a thoughtful and analytical approach, for example: 'The extended metaphor of a prison was utilized effectively to explore my feelings on zoos and their impact on society. Using passive verbs like "chained up", "served their slop" and "incarcerated" helps the reader to empathise on a more human level'. Another stronger commentary provided some detailed analysis in, 'My second paragraph begins as a question. This accusatory tone conveys that I am passionate about the topic at hand. I address the editor directly, in a semi-formal tone that aligns with the amount of formality required in an email. My use of "captivity" and incapacitated' displays that I am educated on the topic, strengthening my argument.'

However, there were very few candidates who explained their linguistic choices and many weaker responses merely paraphrased the content of the **Question 1(a)** response. Some candidates, while demonstrating ability to identify linguistic features, purely listed what they had used without explanation and often without evidence. Candidates should not use linguistic terminology unless they are confident in the use of a specific term. For example, some candidates claimed to have employed metaphors but seemed to be unclear about what a metaphor is. In addition, some candidates claimed that they had employed certain devices like 'juxtaposition' and 'anaphora' when there was no such clear effect created in the response. Most candidates were able to reference the tone and level of formality but did not always provide a suitable reference. It is important to provide references/examples for analysis/comment. Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

You have been watching a TV series about famous bridges. You decide to write a review of the series, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Stronger responses addressed the genre conventions of a review, focusing on positives and negatives. They covered strategies used to deliver the show such as music, interviews, animations and re-enactments. They

also recognised the show's quite narrow audience and created an effective tone that engaged the reader. The review style was clearly adhered to and some went beyond the format of just talking about how famous bridges were presented and saw further than the engineering: 'Occasionally the hosts will include art that has been influenced by these views (from the bridges). Pieces made using recycled cups, acrylic paints or digital art are featured in their own segment.' Stronger responses sometimes made a good deal of the narrator's voice, being in one case described as 'constantly pleasurable' throughout the TV series.

Some weaker responses to this question were short, sometimes fewer than 400 words, with some candidates just writing a list of elements they liked or disliked. Other weaker responses included a recount of the series with short, limited comments on aspects like cinematography, logistics and trivia. Vague comments such as the narrator had 'profound knowledge' and 'the bridge was almighty' seemed to reflect candidates struggling to come up with enough subject matter to fulfil the minimum length requirement of the question. Frequent errors, poor organisation and weak expression impeded some responses.

Question 3 – Story

Write a story called *New World*, about a group of people who are the first to go and live on another planet. In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Responses depicted stories of people who were migrating to, or who were stranded on, unknown planets, along with alien encounters and nerve shredding rocket take-offs. A major problem for many candidates was creating a whole story; a significant number of responses did not provide a clear conclusion. Not all candidates were mindful of the wording of the phrase 'a group of people' in the question. Some responses focused solely on a single character having received an invitation to join an expedition, which never materialised as the focus was primarily on preparation and nothing more. Any attempt at creating drama and suspense was therefore limited.

Stronger stories were complete, with a well-defined ending. Such response incorporated a group of people without getting too involved in their back stories, and sustained a mood of drama and suspense throughout, with well-crafted endings, such as seen in this example: 'The familiar sunny skies that Aya had become acquainted with disappeared the moment she blinked, revealing an infinite sky of stars and flying asteroids of an asteroid belt. "You, my Starlette, are on another planet. Every person and building are just a hologram." More imaginative responses included a failed launch prior to a dramatic count down caused by a faulty control button. Once the issue was sorted, the narrative proceeded with a dramatic account of the launch: 'ships thrusters at full throttle blasting the crew out of the earth's orbit.' The best responses fused narrative with effective atmosphere and description, as in this section of a candidate's story: 'As we removed our helmets, we were met by a light morning breeze. The first weak rays of purple light from this planet's sun, a gas giant ten times larger than our own, began to illuminate the expanse beneath our ship. A pungent, completely alien smell arose from the orange earth. We had arrived.' Stronger stories even included jargon for the new planets or relating to a dystopian world, such as 'cryosleep' and 'gravity mitigation'.

Weaker responses displayed a less confident control of grammar, with limited features of narrative writing. Such candidates often wrote about aliens, with little context provided as to the story's setting. Such responses did not maintain a satisfactory mood throughout. They were incomplete or had insecure story endings, such as: 'All I saw was pitch black. I pulled out a flashlight and began to look at the truck outside. Once I had opened the door, I shined the light along the line of the forest outside. A dark figure could be seen standing motionless. I tried to call out but felt a searing pain instead.' Other weaker candidates focused on over-long introductions to the 'expedition' or 'invitation' with family reactions, which did little to engage the reader. Weaker stories often included too much dialogue – very often incorrectly punctuated – and finished with unsatisfactory, cliff hanger endings.

Question 4 – Essay

Your class has just had a discussion about the pros and cons of teenagers getting work experience before they leave school. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

This question provided a range of responses, some quite engaging and well-planned but some lacking organisation and demonstrating general ideas of acquiring work experience, therefore only achieving the task in an elementary fashion.

Stronger responses had a strong personal voice and featured more complex language. They were structured sensibly and included both pros and cons. Many cited the positives of work experience, including candidates

gaining technical skills and preparation for future work, along with a chance to become 'economically independent.' Counter arguments included the pressure placed on young people at a time when they should be enjoying life and not engaging solely in their studies. Candidates who wrote stronger responses developed their opinions clearly and used discourse markers to provide a clear and logical structure. They used rhetorical devices, such as in this example: 'How effectively do schools prepare students for adult life? They do not pay attention to real life skills.' Clear and more developed responses extend ideas with some detail, as shown in this example: 'There are a lot of jobs that look fun but in reality, there are certain skills that you need for the job, or there are a lot of hidden tasks and processes that need to be done which might not be what you want to do. Some jobs that have a lot of hidden work are police officers, firefighters and astronauts which are some of the most admired jobs by teenagers and children. All of these have great people and role models, but all have training stress, and challenges that some would not like.'

In weaker responses, it often seemed that candidates had found the formal format of essay writing hard to cope with and wrote as if writing a magazine article or delivering a speech, with direct address and rhetorical devices. They tended to repeat themselves and showed limited personal experience, as their anecdotes were unconvincing. Quite a lot of weak responses to this question were notably short of 600 words, so points lacked development. Other candidates wrote without clear control of language, such as in this section of one essay: 'When working a job it shows capabilities that are basic, but still very important to many jobs like actually having the responsibility of job, this could result in getting a job when somebody else is considered for a position.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/12
Writing Paper 12

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Occasionally, the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, they should pay particular attention to key words which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for the *opening of a biography* about *someone you admire* and to do two things: *focus on why you have chosen to write about this person*, and to *create a sense of interest* in them. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by 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.
- 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 not be overambitious in their choice of less common lexis, unless the precise meaning of the selected word is properly understood.
- 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 a few candidates failed to answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, comprising engaging biography openings with an appropriate tone. Weaker responses often lacked a sense of being the *opening* to a biography and often merely related part of the chosen person's life.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on 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 mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were simply recounts of the jewellery course, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion; some responses to **Question 3** lacked any sense of drama or suspense; while some **Question 4** responses were repetitive and lacked variety and balance.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

Question 1

In class, you have been talking about role models. Your teacher has asked you to write the opening of a biography about someone you admire.

- (a) Write the text for your biography opening, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, focus on why you have chosen to write about this person, and create a sense of interest in them.

Role models included celebrities, activists, influencers, doctors, religious figures and fictional characters. Many candidates wrote about parents, grandparents or teachers and their life's journey, quite often from rags to riches. Those who wrote about family members, especially mothers and fathers, sometimes strayed more into autobiography, but they were also often too emotional and sentimental, which tended to limit the quality of expression. Some candidates wrote at length debating what a role model is, seemingly leaving little time to write about their chosen subject.

Candidates who wrote the most effective responses focused from the very start on the form of a biography. They included plenty of factual information, often chronologically, and used emotive language in a controlled manner, such as in this opening to a biography entitled 'Greta Thunburg – The Pigtailed Activist':

'How to begin? Thunburg's life is not yet complete, yet she has touched hearts across the world, inspired minds throughout countries. Though she was, you could say, just a stone in an avalanche, Thunburg infinitely increased the velocity of this rock fall – more and more seemingly insignificant stones joined the movement, increasing the momentum until the impact shook people worldwide.'

Stronger responses demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the conventions of biography, were written in third person, past tense and included factual details, anecdotes about early life and accomplishments, as well as engaging the audience's interest and desire to read on and discover more about the subject. Such candidates wrote in an appropriate style, chronologically detailing key moments in the person's life with a clear focus on why that person was of interest to them. In stronger responses, genre was effectively established in the opening paragraph. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Jermaine Lamar Cole, formerly known as J. Cole, is an American rapper, composer and producer, well-established by hit singles "No Role Modelz" and "Middle Child". Born 28th January 1985 in North Carolina, he went on to be amongst the greatest rappers of the 21st century.' These candidates created a believable authorial voice and ended the piece with hints of what was to come in the main biography. Stronger responses displayed genuine knowledge about the chosen person, for example: 'Her art comes through as a beautiful mixture of rich culture and strong identity, steering away from traditional dances or "Marghams", but diving into a new realm of dance exploration.'

Other higher-level responses ended the final paragraph in a way which matched the remit of writing the *opening* to a biography: 'However, his story does not end there.' Another such example ended with: 'How she managed to attain such life skills is further explored in the upcoming chapters.'

Weaker responses did not address the keyword 'opening' and told the whole life story, often employing long, uncontrolled paragraphs. They either left out any anchoring autobiographical details or did not accurately detail them; for example, one candidate wrote about Elon Musk using vague language: 'This brilliant child was born in South Africa around the 1980.' The same candidate lapsed into casual language, such as: 'See the thing is...' as a paragraph header. Many weaker biography openings were short, often under 200 words, and therefore lacked in development of ideas. Many weaker responses were lacking in structure, often without any paragraph breaks at all. Many of the least effective pieces were impeded, sometimes severely, by inaccurate language use, spelling and punctuation, as in this example: 'Kenneth Griffin is a person who change our life and increase it. I chose this person because he is my idol. He give us a hope, his life is a big example for people. Ken Griffin's biography must be in history.'

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

One approach that worked well for some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answer and explaining the effect on the audience. However, many responses were limited in detail and did not provide evidence from their **Question 1(a)**.

Most candidates who produced stronger responses approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the content of the biography opening and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how the writer's stylistic choices related to audience and shaped meaning, using terminology to enhance their analysis, for example: 'The use of the adjective "luscious" describes the mountain to be full of shiny, green, beautiful trees and bushes. This also hints at the many creatures that live there which is a subtle foreshadowing of his encounter of a snake. Lastly the sibilance of the "s" sound, "stone solid" creates a rhythmic tone and engages the reader. It also emphasises how rough and tough Zuva's feet were, most likely due to the accumulation of trips on rocky land barefoot.' Other candidates analysed some of their choice of lexis in some detail, for example: 'I made use of emotive words "desperate", "alone" and "dirty" in an attempt to create a dark atmosphere. This was then contrasted with the image of strength, courage and hope formed by the words "saviour", "inspire" and "light".'

Weaker responses were often very short or very general, listing lots of features but needing more in terms of analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. Some candidates demonstrated an ability to identify some basic language and structural features, but seemed to find analysis more difficult. Others made some valid points in their commentaries but did not give examples to back them up, such as in this example: 'This closeness is created by the use of colloquial language and a relaxed register, making the reader feel comfortable and more likely to believe what you're communicating.' Quite frequently candidates included quite obvious points, such as: 'The text is structured in paragraphs to divide it up clearly.'

In some weaker responses, candidates merely listed linguistic features they said they had used without any supporting evidence, for example: 'I used a simile, a metaphor and personification', and 'My biography used listing and sub-headings.' Often, there was little attempt to explain how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose, other than making vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader. Some candidates attempted to provide some analysis of their choices but did not manage to do so with clarity, such as in this example: 'The biography contains commas "Kylie Countrell is an actress, singer, dancer and a model." The purpose of this is so that the commas are used for listing. The effect of this is so that the reader's attention is diverted.'

There were also many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their biography openings or focusing solely on structure, needing more in the way of language. Many weaker responses were filled with generalisations, such as in these two examples: 'I used the word "brightly" to create a

clear picture in the reader's mind.'; 'I have used varied words to create an image in the reader's mind and to entertain them.' Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some cases the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Review

Last month, you did a one-day jewellery-making course for beginners. You decide to write a review of this course, which will be published in your school magazine. Write between 600 and 900 words.

This was the second most popular question in **Section B**, with just under a quarter of candidates answering it.

Most who tackled this question wrote a review with an appropriate degree of informality for a school magazine and the review form was generally followed by most candidates, with some evaluative lexis being included. Some candidates talked about jewellery making in general, without directly linking to the one-day course; others spent too much time describing the facilities and trainer rather than the day's events.

Stronger responses established a sense of review writing from the outset; for example one candidate began their review like this: 'Right at the heart of Cedar's Square Mall lies a neat little shop called Glitz and Glam. It is studded with sparkly jewellery and glamour. The course is offered to beginners at the price of \$200 per person.' Many candidates made use of engaging titles and included sub-headings as an effective way of organising their responses. These strategies helped to provide coherence and cohesion and gave the writing a clear focus.

Stronger responses reviewed various aspects of the course, for example how the writer discovered the course, the venue, the price, the quality of the instruction, the process of production, the designs they created, friendships made on the day and the quality of the food, rather than simply describing the process of jewellery-making, or type of jewellery made. Convincing jargon and careful lexical choice were apparent in many answers. For example, one candidate wrote: 'I decided to match the coquette style of the bracelets I had created, which were inspired by the iconic 2007 Vivienne Westwood pearl collection, to create my gift box, which was pink, pastel and lined with lace.'

Stronger responses demonstrated a good understanding of both form and audience. They understood the need to provide constructive feedback, balancing the pros and the cons in a polite and friendly tone, whilst engaging the reader, such as in this example: 'We were welcomed at the entrance of the studio by a woman who had been in the business for over ten years, so it was clear we were in professional hands. She was polite and warm towards us, but, as we were soon to discover, also rather strict about the rules.' These reviews ended with recommendations and ratings.

Weaker responses were often either unrealistically extreme or contradicted themselves between the start and the end (going from an excellent experience to a terrible one, for example). Some responses tended to be mostly descriptive rather than evaluative. Often, weaker responses placed undue emphasis on parking, the appearance and idiosyncrasies of the instructor and criticising or praising other aspects of the course unrelated to the jewellery making process. A number of weaker responses began with somewhat irrelevant preambles involving surfing the internet, travelling to the venue and lengthy descriptions of lunch-break menus. Other weaker responses contained unconvincing claims, such as the value-for-money courses which sent participants home with diamond bracelets and necklaces, along with descriptions of badly run courses where instructors tortured or abused participants, or where participants were forced to work arduous shifts, or lost fingers operating machinery. Some weaker responses to this question were short, sometimes fewer than 400 words, with some just writing a list of elements they liked or disliked. Frequent errors, poor organisation and weak expression impeded some responses.

Question 3 – Story

Write a story which begins with the following sentence: *He slowly picked up the phone, and even before he heard the voice he knew exactly who it was.* In your writing, create a sense of drama and suspense. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most candidates were able to provide some sense of drama and suspense – often by employing emotive language and/or withholding information. Areas for improvement included better narrative cohesion, plot development strategies and more successful creation of drama or suspense. Some candidates shifted the

narrative perspective throughout their text and many cliff-hanger endings did not effectively conclude the narrative arc of the story.

Stronger stories provided believable characters and credible scenarios, with a sense of drama and suspense. These candidates were careful to avoid wildly unreal circumstances such as murder by unidentified animals. Many stronger stories were engaging from the outset. For example, this candidate opened their story with three short sentences following the prompt, creating an immediate sense of drama and suspense: 'He knew exactly who it was. Lily. He knew those raspy, breathless pants. She'd found him.' In one very well-crafted story a man was receiving phone calls from his dead partner. He kept on claiming that the woman was not who she said she was. It was only at the very end that he revealed all in a surprising twist: 'I knew it was not her because I killed her'.

Other candidates whose responses were successful used a variety of vocabulary and sentence structure to engage the audience, as in this example: "Are you there?" It was barked out like a sergeant in the forces assembles his men. But Desmond knew that this was a voice that had gained authority from clandestine operations – not the honour merited from being in the army. He raked his hands through his hazelnut brown, English hair, feeling the dampness of sweat on his scalp. He could not escape the thoughts that harassed him, hounding him by day and howling at him by night.'

Weaker responses were often quite dull, sometimes because of too much lengthy background detail and a failure to excite curiosity. Such stories often showed very little coherence and relied too much on dialogue, which then resulted in a large number of technical errors. Some of the weaker stories opened with the given sentence but promptly abandoned the idea of it. Some offered convoluted stories which became overly complicated, losing the thread of the plot. Other stories were quite basic in terms of expression or littered with errors; some included both, for example: 'He picked the call up and asked her what happened why you called me.'

Question 4 – Essay

In class, you have been discussing whether younger people care more or less about climate change than older people do. Your teacher has asked you to write an essay on the topic, giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

The majority of candidates who answered this question offered a range of developed points, along with their own opinion on the topic. Most candidates used an appropriately formal or semi-formal register. Some candidates focused more on the general consequences of climate change and neglected to discuss in depth the generational conflict implied in the question.

Stronger responses tended to be written more guardedly, holding in balance both older and younger people's views and not making bold claims for the caring attitudes of either group, recognising that 'older people' and 'younger people' were not fixed terms. They acknowledged that any established systems for environmental protection that had already been set up were practically to the credit of older people at work. Stronger responses showed full awareness of the form of the writing from the outset, as in this opening to an essay: 'There is a general consensus amongst the youth that the elderly care far less about crucial issues in modern life, such as climate change. However, the elderly object to these accusations, and make compelling arguments in favour of the contrary. This essay will outline both perspectives.' Stronger essays were structured clearly in paragraphs, with each paragraph beginning with a topic sentence. They then concluded with clearly expressed opinions to sum up the writer's views, as in this example: 'So I do not think the idea of who cares more or less should even be a topic of discussion. I think we have to simply understand one another and realise we are all united by one common goal: to save our dying planet. The discussions and arguments of who actually cares more are irrelevant and are distracting us from our task at hand. We all care, for our own reasons, and what actually matters is that we do something about it.'

In weaker responses, candidates frequently seemed to struggle to provide a range of ideas. Such responses were often quite repetitive and, quite often, short. Many weaker responses relied on clichés such as older people being unable to use the internet. There was often some lack of formality in the register for an essay. Ideas were not always coherently linked and conjunctions were used very mechanically. Other weaker responses were marred, sometimes severely, by frequent errors of varying kinds. For example, one candidate opened their essay like this: 'The world is slowly dying and we are the ones to blame, well I say "we" but in the end my genartions contribution to it has been minor at best, the one to blame are older genartions though they still blatantly refused to belive in things like climet change.'

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/13
Writing Paper 13

Key messages

- Candidates should manage their time carefully, allocating an equal amount of time for each section of the paper. Occasionally, the time spent on **Section A** seemed to have left candidates insufficient time to meet the required word count in **Section B** or to satisfactorily complete the task.
- Candidates should be aware that relevant content in the correct form is a key aspect of the overall assessment of responses for **Question 1(a)** and **Section B** tasks. To ensure that candidates understand the key requirements of each question, they should pay particular attention to key words which indicate the specified form, content, audience and purpose of the tasks chosen. For example, in **Question 1(a)** the key instructions are to write the text for a **blog about your experience of volunteering at an important international sporting event** and to do two things: **create a sense of enthusiasm** for the event, and **encourage others to volunteer**. In order to achieve the task (one of the Level 3 criteria on the mark scheme) these instructions must be followed.
- Candidates must understand the importance of writing in clear, properly punctuated English, with accurate sentence demarcation, to perform well in this exam. Punctuation is a vital and essential aid to communication, especially as a guide to the structure of sentences, so it is imperative that candidates know and understand the basics of sentence construction if they are to succeed on this paper.
- Clear expression in simple and compound sentences with less variety is preferable to expression that does not flow, in long, rambling sentences. Some candidates lose control of grammar when they attempt to write in long, complex sentences. One error that again occurred regularly was that of separating sentences with commas rather than full stops; another common error was writing in sentence fragments. Clear and accurate sentence demarcation is crucial, followed by 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.
- 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 not be overambitious in their choice of less common lexis, unless the precise meaning of the selected word is properly understood.
- 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 a few candidates failed to answer **Question 1(b)** at all. Some candidates wrote well over 400 words for **Question 1(a)**, often at the expense of **Section B**, which was either short or impeded by errors (possibly indicating that they had run out of time to check their work).

In responses to **Question 1(a)**, stronger responses focused clearly on the question, comprising engaging blog entries written in an appropriate tone. These candidates gave a lively, enthusiastic account of their

experience and overtly encouraged others to volunteer. Weaker responses often lacked an appropriate tone of enthusiasm and merely related the writer's experience.

The strongest responses to **Question 1(b)** maintained a close focus on 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 mostly, or entirely, on content and therefore only provided minimal analysis by indirectly outlining the structure of the piece.

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

Weaker responses on **Section B** generally contained frequent errors or lacked focus on what the task required. For example, some responses to **Question 2** were more narrative than descriptive; in some responses to **Question 2** the content was repetitive and lacked variety and balance; and some **Question 4** responses were simply recounts of a visit to the café, with very little in the way of critique or personal opinion.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Shorter writing and reflective commentary

You and your friends are currently volunteering at an important international sporting event that is taking place in your country. You have decided to write a blog about your experience.

- (a) Write the text for your blog entry, using no more than 400 words. In your writing, create a sense of enthusiasm for the event, and encourage others to volunteer at future events too.

Sporting events included athletics, football and tennis. Candidates provided details of the tasks involved and most understood the task and were able to use the language of blogging, effectively appealing to their intended audiences. Some candidates focused mostly on volunteering, not necessarily at a sporting event. It is essential that candidates read the tasks carefully.

Stronger responses focused effectively on the task from the outset, as in this example: 'Sports 24, New Zealand – an important international event in the sporting calendar. I would like to share my thrilling experience of being a volunteer for this prestigious occasion.' Stronger responses were written in an informal, conversational register, together with other structural and lexical features typical of blogs. For example, one candidate opened their blog very convincingly, with an account name, date and summary of blog content: 'kelly_is_cool_321 posted 21 mins ago (Just had the MOST fun of my life volunteering for @InternationalClimbingFederation)'

Many stronger responses were very inclusive and mindful of their blog's audience, as in this opening: 'Welcome back my people to another edition of Adam's Adventures!' Stronger responses adopted a friendly tone and a chatty or colloquial register, some employing an effective heading, such as: 'Summer of Sails! My experience of volunteering with sailing champions' and 'Have A Go!!' Others employed direct address and rhetorical questions to engage their audience. Stronger blog entries clearly referred to the benefits of volunteering in order to encourage others, such as to 'strengthen your teamwork and communication skills'. They employed hyperbole to exemplify enthusiasm, as in this example: 'It was an unforgettable and life-changing experience.'

In stronger entries, candidates clearly expressed their enthusiasm for both the event itself and for volunteering in general, for example in this extract: 'Quite frankly, it was pretty hectic! Balloons, confetti, banners, all in bright colours; pumped up music blasting through speakers; competitors and their families cheering at the top of their lungs – everything about the festival burst with energy. Even I could not help but cheer along as I organised the equipment.' Stronger blog entries also ended effectively, for example with this brief but emphatic note: 'Make a change. Volunteer!'

In weaker responses, candidates gave a less expansive recount of their own actions. Sometimes they were rather vague about the international sporting event itself, quite often neglecting to name it, as in this example: 'The atmosphere, people and the event itself is something no one should be missing.' Weaker responses were often repetitive and limited in scope. Many weaker blog entries were short, often under 200 words, and therefore lacked any development of ideas. Many

candidates needed to pay more attention to structuring their response, often writing without any paragraph breaks. The least effective scripts were impeded, sometimes severely, by inaccurate language use, spelling and punctuation, despite sometimes having been written in an effective tone. For example, one candidate wrote: 'Although I understand your concerns of volunteering, thinking that it will be tedious and boring, the reality is implausible and contradicted to your thoughts. I can still recall the moment I guid the sport stars into the studio, I am welcomed by a profound sense of acclamation.'

- (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 some candidates was to use a Point, Evidence, Explanation format to analyse the form, structure and language of their responses to **Question 1(a)**. They named, one by one, the techniques used, giving precise evidence from their answers and explaining the effect on the audience. Most responses would have been improved with greater detail and provision of evidence from the **Question 1(a)** response.

In most stronger responses, candidates approached this question in one of two ways, each of which proved to be successful: addressing form and structure by going through the email's content and then concentrating on language; or going through the text, simultaneously analysing all language devices. Stronger responses included a range of features, such as anaphora and hypophora, and discussed their usage confidently. They gave precise examples and analysed how the writer's stylistic choices relate to audience and shape meaning, using terminology to enhance their analysis, for example: 'Firstly I used listing to exemplify the intense atmosphere of the football matches: "Thousands of other fans, singing the chants, booing the ref, cheering the goals." I did this to create the overwhelming effect of the masses of people filling the stadium and the power of their unity. By using jargon in my blog, such as "soccer-head" and "ref, offside", I make it clear that I am involved in football culture and it helped my blog appear more authentic.'

Other stronger responses considered linguistic choice, purpose and audience in an integrated way. For example, one candidate wrote: 'To further fulfil the blog prompt, I frequently used colloquial lexis and hedges and utilized my punctuation to create a stylized tone. I used informal lexis like "quite frankly", creating the effect of casual spoken language with the audience. I used hedges like "pretty" before the adjective "hectic" which is also considered informal.'

Weaker responses were often very short or very general, listing lots of features without adequate analysis of their effects. Incorrect terminology was also common. Weaker responses sometimes identified some basic language and structural features but were limited in terms of analysis. Some weaker responses included some valid points but did not include examples to back them up, such as in this example: 'This closeness is created by the use of colloquial language and a relaxed register, making the reader feel comfortable and more likely to believed what your communicating.' Quite frequently, candidates included fairly obvious points, such as: 'The text is structured into paragraphs to make it neat and easy to read.' Some candidates merely listed linguistic features they said they had used without any supporting evidence, for example: 'I used similes and hyperboles', 'My blog used a mixture of both first person and second person'. Often there was little attempt to explain how a technique's use furthered the writer's purpose, other than making vague assertions about keeping the reader interested or to connect with the reader.

There were also many examples of candidates merely paraphrasing their blog entries or focusing solely on structure with little or nothing on language. Many weaker responses were filled with generalisations, such as in these two examples: 'I have used the word "colorful" to create a picture in the reader's mind.'; 'I have used different literary devices to create an image in the reader's mind.' Other responses were extremely short, sometimes under 100 words, and in some case the question was not attempted.

Section B: Extended writing

Question 2 – Descriptive Piece

Write a descriptive piece about a lake early in the morning. In your writing, focus on colour, light and movement to help your reader imagine the scene. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Many candidates responded well to this question and most candidates wrote descriptively quite consistently, although some took a narrative approach, which was not always helpful.

Stronger responses demonstrated an ability to engage the attention of the reader through effective choices of language, as well as establishing a calm and atmospheric early morning scene. A gradual move towards daylight was a feature of some evocative writing. Some stronger responses provided a contrast between the lake and its surroundings. In one response, the candidate described the early morning calm of the 'gentle lake' with an imminent changing weather pattern which 'turned the lake into a crashing wave.' Colours, light, movements and sounds were often described with subtlety and maturity, such as in this example: 'The burning cold air stung my nostrils and singed my red cheeks, each freezing gust of wind like a thousand tiny needles in my skin. With each step through the long dewy grass, my socks grew soggy but the lake grew closer.'

Many stronger responses employed vivid imagery, using rich sensory details to create a visual scene. Stronger responses were often thoughtful and engaging, with many candidates clearly adept at using sensory language and changing the focus by zooming in on specific details. There were some elegant examples of descriptive vocabulary which helped craft some memorable scenes, as in this example: 'Summit Lake itself is shaped in the form of a giant tear drop, with the tip of the tear pointing towards the cliff side. In the wee hours of the morning, when the world and the sun are fast asleep, waiting for the beginning of a new day, Summit Lake is asleep as well. Its water is pitch black with tiny white spots reflecting the canvas of bright stars in the night sky. In the absence of clouds, the Milky Way itself can be seen, reminding the lake of its miniscule place in the vastness of the cosmos.'

In weaker responses, candidates did try to focus on colour, light and movement but their language was sometimes ineffective or the responses contained frequent errors which affected clarity, for example: 'As the lake descended deeper and deeper into the vastness of water, the colours followed too.' Control of sense and sentence demarcation were the commonest indicators of a lack of control seen in weaker writing. These candidates often had ambitious ideas, but their pieces were brought down by mistakes in grammar, especially tenses, incorrect word use and frequent minor sentences, such as in this example: 'The world still asleep. Silence echo's through the banks rebounding off each other. The sun's rays vibrant mirage of hue's illuminates the water and the tree's that are as tall as skyscrapers. The water as still as a human when a shark is approaching them.'

Question 3 – Speech

You are going to take part in a debate at school about the pros and cons of children keeping pets. Your headteacher has asked you to open the debate by giving a speech on the topic. Write the text for your speech, discussing both points of view and giving your opinion. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most responses were in an appropriate speech form but not all candidates seemed to be aware that they were only opening the debate and paving the way for the rest of the discussion to follow.

Stronger responses established this distinction effectively, displaying evidence of considering both sides of the argument in a constructive manner, for example by adding personal examples thus building credibility. They also showed awareness of the school context and were organised clearly in paragraphs, utilising clear discursive markers, such as: 'On the one hand children can learn valuable concepts,' and, 'However, there are benefits of children keeping pets.'

Stronger responses weighed the pros against the cons in a balanced way. One candidate did this by utilising a tricolon for each side of the debate. Arguments in favour of children keeping pets, 'providing a sense of responsibility', 'for companionship' and how a pet can be a 'comforting friend' were weighed against the cons of a pet being 'costly', 'time consuming' and 'hard work'. Convincing and sustained arguments on each point were all supported by evidence and facts. The most effective responses paid close attention to the rubric, noting that the text constituted a precursory activity to a school debate. Thus, for one candidate, who had employed an initial, engaging hook, the closure of the text provided an opportunity for a compelling directive: 'Which will you side with? Let the debate begin.'

One quite thoughtful piece put forward the idea that, for busy working parents, a pet such as a dog or cat can provide a child with companionship, play opportunities, a confidant – and that the child can be encouraged to talk to the parents about what they have been doing with the pet over a meal. Another candidate took a philosophical slant: 'I know I would love to come home every day to a smile that never wears away, a tail that does not stop wagging, a beak that never stops chirping – and I believe that pets can make this possible.' Another candidate supported the pros of children keeping pets by providing evidence clearly aimed at fellow

students: 'We might say this is true because we feel good when we hang out or play with our pets, but it is also true on a scientific level. Endorphins and dopamine are hormones that make the brain feel relaxed and happy. It has been proven in multiple studies that playing with your pet, can increase your happy hormones anywhere from 10 – 35 per cent. For all the cat owners here, listening to or feeling your cat purring, can act as a therapeutic sound, calming the nerves and the mind. Your pet can also make you feel less lonely by providing quiet company, whether you're sleeping or studying.'

Weaker responses focused mainly on drawing attention to the advantages and disadvantages of raising pets, or discussed what it's like to have a pet and the joy of owning one without anchoring it in the rubric of the question. Other responses were short, sometimes with fewer than 400 words, while some weaker responses were impeded by frequent errors, which meant that the writing was not clear. For example, one candidate wrote: 'You will never know when the pet is feeling off mood and when you should not go ahead and touch it. Therfor always a safe maintain distance is needed which most children lack due to their lack of patience and them being full of energy and enthusiastic. In such sudden attacks children will be ceased with consternation and trepidation.'

Question 4 – Review

You recently went to a local café which is run by teenagers. You decide to post a review of the café on your blog. Write between 600 and 900 words.

Most responses showed engagement with the task, with candidates writing enthusiastic reviews, offering opinions on café décor, service, coffee and atmosphere. Most chose to write in an informal register suitable for a blog, and most aimed their review at fellow teenage readers. There was generally an awareness that this was a review and that there needed to be some balance expressed with a final verdict.

Stronger responses adopted a friendly tone for their blog and were clear about the need to provide a respectful, constructive critique of the pros and cons of a local café run by teenagers. They provided credible details on various aspects of the dining experience, such as the décor, music, customer service, location and accessibility as well as the range of items on the menu and where the ingredients were sourced from. Stronger responses also displayed a knowledge of beverages and cuisine, particularly emphasising the roles played by the teenage management team. One candidate produced a strong and convincing review of 'Haley & Co.'. There was a clear overview of the new venture featuring opening times and location. The reviewer provided details of the décor, reflecting the youthful staff, describing the 'chic' furniture and 'surprisingly comfortable' chairs. Positive language reflected the reviewer's enthusiasm with words such as 'divine', 'amazing' and an observation about: 'the commendable extra caution taken by the chef to accommodate my wife's nut allergy'. All aspects of the review demonstrated the candidate's full appreciation of the need to reflect positive teenage values.

Stronger reviews used an appropriate level of informality expected of a blog, such as in this opening: 'Hey lovely food lovers. Your favourite food content creator is here to serve you enjoyment.' They provided clear and concise evaluations, such as this one: 'As someone who travels with food at the forefront of my mind, I am picky with food. However, Youth Café surprisingly delivered top-quality meals from not only Australia, but meals rooted in other cultures. The highlight of this hidden gem definitely lies in its dish: Moroccan Tangine.' Another candidate wrote: 'These teenagers do not play around. They are certified baristas, so you know what type of quality you are getting. As soon as you enter, the café has a cozy modern design, with band posters from the 90's, which is ironic, because all of the baristas were born after the 00's. One of them is a coffee-art specialist, so what he makes is no doubt a picture-worthy shot. Who knew there was such a job as a "coffee art specialist!"'

Some weaker responses barely acknowledged the teen input and tended to just observe the café's workings rather than critique them. They contained quite detailed accounts of the visit to the café but only provided short, limited comments on aspects expected in detail in such a review, like staffing, service, layout and quality of food and drinks. Such responses lacked clear understanding of the conventions of this form and some presented opinions in terms of a rant. Other reviews were short, sometimes with fewer than 400 words, with some candidates just writing a list of elements they liked or disliked. Frequent errors, poor organisation and weak expression impeded some responses.

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/21
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

1. Learners answering poetry passage questions are advised to offer an overview of the set poem as a framework for their intended analytical points.
2. Learners should plan their essays with a clear structure which enables them to keep their response focused on the question.

General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded 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 were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of 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 Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
2. In the 9695 syllabus, **Assessment Objective 4 Communication** states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would improve their overall success by having a clearer direction by which the learner's response to the question is developed to a clear conclusion. 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 can become repetitive and unfocused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** This was a minority choice. Nearly every answer selected relevant material with which to address the task, though only the most successful responses were able to shape their essays to the given quotation. Weaker answers retold the Duke's part in the play, often with at least a basic knowledge of the text. Better answers at this level were aware of Shakespeare's dramatic methods, at least implicitly, with many learners recognising the ambivalence of the Duke's presentation. Some learners found his character 'weak and untrustworthy', noting, for example, his manipulation of Isabella and Mariana, whereas other learners had a more positive view of his 'desire to put right the wrongs of the state.' Those essays that did take account of the given quotation, especially when due weight was given to its source, Lucio, often did well, recognising the 'appropriateness of the comment, given how often the Duke is sneaking around in disguise or even openly eavesdropping on private conversations', as one argued. Learners who were able to explore the dramatic action and language with supporting quotations did very well.
- (b)** This was a popular choice, and most responses were able to place the passage into its context appropriately, though some weaker answers did spend too much time in giving the background of the Duke's absence and Claudio's crime, for example, with a consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. Basic and sound answers were able to discuss Angelo's character and role, with some awareness of the significance of the revelations here as 'he attempts to persuade Isabella into committing fornication', as one answer noted. More competent answers noted some of the dramatic methods: Shakespeare's use of soliloquy and its effects, the contrasting language of Angelo alone and when speaking to Isabella, the use of 'loaded language, such as "pleasure"', and the dramatic tension created by 'Angelo's cunning approach' were all popular discussion points. Good answers developed such arguments by close analysis of the details of the passage, whilst simultaneously considering the wider text, often in terms of characterisation and plot. Where such essays were developed with appropriate reference to wider contexts, as well as specific moments in the play as a whole, the essays did very well.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over three quarters of the learners choosing it, the majority selecting the passage option **(b)**.

- (a)** Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material to answer the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the relationship between Brick and Big Daddy often in detail, though at least implicitly assuming that Brick 'was a homosexual and his father accepted it in him', as one summarised it. Basic answers were aware of the way that the relationship develops during the play, noting, for example, that it is to 'Big Daddy

that Brick reveals the truth of his situation with Skipper and Maggie', with other answers noting how 'Big Daddy, so brusque and mean to the rest of the family, is honest and sensitive when talking to Brick.' More competent answers developed such ideas into considering the relationship more dramatically and how it 'contrasts with other relationships', as one learner suggested, 'especially Gooper and his father.' Sound answers noted the similarities between them, often contrasting their respective marriages and their attitudes to the 'corrupt, mendacious world in which they live', as one essay summarised it. Better answers developed such arguments by close reference to the text, quoting the repeated 'Wouldn't it be funny if that was true?', for example. Good answers also noted the importance of the relationship to the plot, both the 'conflict over the inheritance in the family', and the 'revelation of truth' often discussed to telling effect. Essays that supported these points with appropriate quotation and some awareness of Williams's methods of characterisation did well, particularly where the dramatic nature of many of their exchanges was also explored. The most successful answers were able to synthesise all of these approaches into a coherent and cogent argument, which, in the very best essays, showed a perceptive appreciation of appropriate contexts and how 'Williams turned them into gripping drama', as one essay suggested.

- (b) Every response was aware of the significance of this passage to the play as a whole and had relevant opinions about the family to offer. Weaker answers retold the events up to this point in the play, with a consequent lack of focus on the passage. Other basic answers considered the news of Big Daddy's cancer to Big Mama as 'the source of all of the tension as she lashes out at those around', as one learner argued. The various characters were considered in terms of their own tensions with mention often made of the sibling rivalry, the aggression between Mae and Maggie, the importance of the inheritance, and Brick's alcoholism. More competent answers developed such points by close reference to the passage, often discussing Williams's methods of characterisation soundly. Other essays at this level were aware of Williams's methods, particularly language and stage directions, and how he 'uses them to reveal the true nature of Big Mama's feelings for Big Daddy, particularly in contrast to the unfeeling responses of her family around her', as one essay summarised it. Good answers noted other important details such as the role of Dr Baugh 'as the voice of medical reason and outside the family tensions', though some contrasted his concern with Brick's 'apparent indifference and inappropriate humming', as one essay noted. Confident responses developed the analysis of the tensions, with a clear focus on the dramatic nature of the scene but also on its 'dramatic significance to the play', with 'such asides as "my only son" inspiring Gooper to go to his next option via the briefcase', as one learner suggested. Very good answers saw the full range of tensions and analysed their significance with detailed reference to the passage, secure awareness of Williams's methods, appropriate points from the wider text and, in the most successful responses, more general contexts such as the 'American Dream'.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was the second most popular poetry text, with the vast majority of learners choosing the (b) passage question.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) This was the second most popular poetry question, with most learners showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the poem. Some very weak answers struggled to develop their reference to Angelou's concerns, suggesting the poem was being treated as an unseen, limiting their essays in terms of context and content. Better answers at this level had a clear view of the poem, often summarising its meaning in detail and offering general comments about the speaker's feelings, though with only an implicit sense of Angelou's methods of presentation. More competent responses explored the 'range of things that the speaker is not afraid of', with some analysing both 'the nature of the "threats" and the personality of the speaker', as one learner summarised it. Other sound answers considered the 'age of speaker, with many of the frightening things seeming to be childish', as one essay interpreted it. There was also awareness of Angelou's methods at this level of performance, particularly language, symbols and the 'nursery rhyme like rhymes and structure', as one response suggested. More confident responses considered the effects of the poetic voice, the inconsistent rhythm and the occasional more adult threats, with some suggesting the 'anxieties of childhood outlined here have leached into the adult whose fears

are not as controlled as the speaker would make it seem', as one essay perceptively argued. More successful answers linked this poem into the wider selection effectively and often made appropriate contextual points, which were effective when integrated well into the discussions.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the most popular text in the poetry section with a range of answers seen on both options.

- (a) Most learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Basic answers tended to take each of the main characters in the poem in turn, considering 'whether they had honour or not', as one learner expressed it. At this level, there were detailed accounts given of the two meetings between Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, with some implicit awareness of how honour was or was not revealed. More successful answers noted how 'the Green Knight in Arthur's court is boastful and arrogant but in the chapel is much more like an honourable knight', according to one candidate. Competent answers often had contextual points about knightly honour on which to base their essays, enabling them to select material from across the entire poem, often showing secure knowledge and understanding. Characters were still the main focus at this level, but there was often some awareness of Armitage 'shaping the reader's attitude by what they said and did.' As this approach became more analytical, considering language and imagery, for example, as well as symbols and contrasting settings, so the answers became more confident and developed. Good answers always had a secure knowledge of the details of the text and were able to support their points with apposite quotations or direct references to the text. Very good answers were well prepared with the contextual points about honour as a chivalric concept and some essays offered perceptive interpretations of how Armitage develops and even subverts conventional attitudes to honour.
- (b) Most learners had at least a basic knowledge of the text and were able to discuss Sir Gawain relevantly. Some weaker answers were unsure of the specific context to the passage – Sir Gawain readying himself to leave Camelot – and, assuming he was in Bertilak's castle, were insecure in their responses. Basic answers, aware of the context, tended to summarise Sir Gawain's previous encounter with the Green Knight, with a consequent loss of focus on the detail of the passage. More competent answers were aware of 'the preceding gloom in Camelot in expectation of him leaving on his doomed mission', as one learner summarised it, and could explore the 'grandeur and brilliance of his preparations', with that in mind. Sound answers considered Armitage's use of symbols, the detailed cataloguing of a knight's armour and the use of 'hyperbole to enhance Sir Gawain's appearance, such as "fabulous", "shining splendidly" and "extravagant silk"', as one learner noted. Better answers also explored Armitage's language choices, his use of alliterative verse and the effects of 'the almost musical rhythms and sounds, designed to show Sir Gawain as the best of knights', as one learner argued. Better answers developed such points into considering, for example, how the presentation of the horse is 'designed to further elevate Sir Gawain', with others noting the significance of religion and 'his loyalty to God and king as significant points in his presentation as a true worthy knight', as one learner suggested. Very good answers always supported any analysis of Armitage's methods with quotations from the passage, as well as integrating wider text references and, in some very successful essays, apposite contextual points.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

This was the least popular poetry text in this session, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Very weak answers appeared to be responding to an unseen, with only a generalised knowledge of the poem and its context and therefore struggling to develop an appreciation of Blake's concerns. Basic answers tended to summarise the poem as a general criticism of the city and the industrial revolution, with too little focus on the details of the poem. Other answers at this level offered a line-by-line paraphrase, though were unable to develop an argument about Blake's view of the city, beyond generalisations, with occasional reference to literary features such as 'caesura' and 'imagery'. More competent answers did focus on the presentation, considering Blake's poetic

methods closely. Language and imagery were often well discussed at this level, with learners offering engaged responses to the 'misery for every inhabitant that Blake reveals in his choices', with some highlighting the 'youthful harlot, the blood of the soldier and the "blackning Church" as potent symbols of the stark reality of life in London', as one learner argued. Confident answers analysed every line for its poetic impact, often linking ideas to the wider text as well as integrating appropriate contextual references. In very good answers, the full range of poetic methods was explored, particularly Blake's use of rhyme and the apparently 'simple verse structure which suggests a simple ballad but here emphasizes the innocence of the people, overwhelmed by the misery of their lives', according to one learner. The use of the first-person narrator – 'perhaps Blake himself' – was identified as 'giving the poem a documentary-like authenticity', as one learner noted. Very good answers supported such points with specific analysis and were always alive to the effects of Blake's choices on the reader.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was a popular poetry text, with the overwhelming majority of learners choosing the option **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Weaker answers were often insecure in knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning, suggesting they were approaching the poem as an unseen. Basic answers tended to summarise the poem in their own words, only implicitly considering how Nancy Fotheringham Cato presents the journey. Other basic answers did look at some poetic methods, often listing them in the opening to the essay, with common choices being alliteration, caesura and 'end-stopped lines'. The comments on these aspects were rarely linked to an overview of the poem itself or the learner's response to the poem as a whole, so that the essays remained a series of unconnected observations about the poem. More successful answers tended to offer a view of the poem in the introduction, providing a basic structure for the learner's response and an interpretative basis for the consideration of Cato's poetic choices. More competent responses looked closely at the language and the imagery, with many noting the use of 'words associated with speed giving the poem an urgent, almost breathless tone', as one learner noted. Sound responses also considered Cato's use of verse form and especially rhythm, with more successful answers considering the effects of these choices. Essays which supported such analyses with close reference to the text often did very well. Very good responses offered more engaged interpretations, with some seeing the poem 'as an allegory for her life generally', which one learner suggested was 'doomed like Icarus as she reached the sun.' The effect of the first-person narrator was well explored at this level, with most learners assuming the speaker was a 'traveller of some kind', though other learners thought the poem 'was about the road itself, as Cato personifies its experience.' Interpretations that were rooted in an analysis of the details of the poem and considered the effects of Cato's choices did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

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

Question 10

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was the most popular prose text in this session, with most learners opting for the passage **(b)** question.

- (a) Nearly every response had relevant knowledge with which to address the question. Weaker answers retold sections of the novel which took place in London, though focusing more on the events and the characters rather than the city itself. More competent answers were able to select carefully key moments, such as the hospital scenes or Briony's responses to her walks through the city or her visits to the library and museum. The significance of the war was well explored and the 'way life seems geared to survival', as one learner noted. More successful answers were aware of the narrative voices, with some considering the effect of Briony's desire for atonement on 'the way the city is portrayed', though few learners were confident in deconstructing the various layers of the narrative. Those that were often did very well. Most essays concentrated on the events and the characters with only a few learners exploring McEwan's methods or offering much in the way of contextual support for their arguments. Very good answers were able to see London as an abstract concept, above the individual characters, and explored the ways in which McEwan portrays the 'dislocation of normal life and the breakdown of the privileged middle-class life depicted in Part 1.'
- (b) Nearly every response was aware of the context to the passage, which was Cecilia's diving into the fountain to rescue the broken vase. Weaker answers tended to retell the story of Robbie and Cecilia's relationship, with more successful essays at this level aware that 'here we get Robbie's reaction to the fountain scene, rather than Briony's', as one learner noted. Basic answers did develop some ideas about Robbie and his attitudes to Cecilia, noting 'his growing desire for her that leads to the fateful letter', as one essay suggested. More competent answers focused on some of the detail of the passage, noting how the 'third person description at the start shifts subtly into Robbie's memories and then his immediate responses', according to one. Language and sentence structure were often well explored at this level, with more confident answers analysing the narrative voice, as 'Robbie starts to fantasise about her provocative act, but then assumes her aim was to humiliate him'. Good answers linked such interpretations into McEwan's wider concerns around status and wealth and relationships. At this level, the complexity of Robbie's response, the 'mixture of intelligence, lust and social insecurity', as one learner summarised, were very well explored, with very good answers showing the significance of his thought processes to the developments later, in the library particularly. Where such arguments were supported by apposite quotation and a secure awareness of appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) There were only a few responses to this question. Very weak essays had limited knowledge and understanding of both passage and text on which to base their points, with some learners confused about key facts such as the relationship between the men and the nature of the door itself. Basic responses were able to retell some of the events of the story, often in detail, but with only an implicit focus on the passage as the ending to it. More competent responses discussed Wells's use of dialogue and 'how the narrator becomes the channel for the reader's own doubts about what has happened', as one summarised it. Other sound responses considered Well's language choices, how the 'door becomes the means by which Wallace is destroyed.' The death of Wallace was generally seen as 'a shock to the reader, created by the narrator's own surprise', as one noted and there was some good analysis of the style here – the short sentences, the language and the use of the first person were all well explored. Very good answers discussed how the structure of the story, particularly the role of the narrator, enabled Wells to create this 'shock ending' and where the arguments were linked to appropriate reference to the preceding story, the answers were very successful.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/22
Drama, Poetry and Prose

Key messages

1. Learners answering poetry passage questions are advised to offer an overview of the set poem as a framework for their intended analytical points.
2. Learners should plan their essays with a clear structure which enables them to keep their response focused on the question.

General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded 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 were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of 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 Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
2. In the 9695 syllabus, **Assessment Objective 4 Communication** states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would improve their overall success by having a clearer direction by which the learner's response to the question is developed to a clear conclusion. 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 can become repetitive and unfocused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text, chosen by over one third of the entry, with most learners opting for the (a) essay option.

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select material with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to narrate the crimes of some of the characters and how they were punished in the play, often showing detailed, if basic, knowledge of the text. Better answers were able to evaluate the severity of both crime and punishment, often contrasting the treatment of Angelo, Claudio and Lucio. Responses were more successful as they recognised such contrasts as part of Shakespeare's dramatic methods. More competent answers were often wider ranging within the text, so that, for example, the treatment of Barnadine and Mistress Overdone were 'considered in the light of the general forgiveness and reconciliations at the end of the play', as one learner suggested. More successful answers also explored how Shakespeare presents the idea of a 'crime' and who has the 'moral authority to judge anyone else at all', as one learner argued. Shakespeare's presentation of abstract ideas such as mercy and justice were often discussed in responses at this level, though the most successful answers were well aware of 'the dramatic effects created by the contrasting fortunes of say Angelo and Claudio', as one essay noted. Very good answers often integrated contextual points tellingly, ranging from attitudes to sexual behaviour to James 1st and his courtiers. Other very good responses discussed how Shakespeare uses comedy, from such as Lucio and Pompey, to undercut the serious nature of, for example, Claudio's position. This led to some interesting discussions about the Duke and his role in the play, with some seeing his 'earlier leniency as the fundamental cause of the problems Angelo is trying to deal with', though others found his 'meddling with and manipulation of Isabella in particular disturbing if dramatically riveting', as one good essay argued. Where such points were supported by apposite quotations the essays invariably did very well.
- (b) Most learners recognised these scenes as coming immediately before the Duke's public return to Vienna. Weaker answers either summarised what happened in each scene with little regard to the context or recounted in detail the Duke's 'disappearance' and subsequent secret involvement in the events to this point in the play. Basic answers considered the characters and the significance of what they said, noting that 'we get a look at what each of the main characters is thinking at this point in the play', as one essay put it. Angelo was often the main focus, his panicked 'hope' that the Duke might have gone mad, followed by his revealing soliloquy, offering great scope for considering Shakespeare's characterisation. Better answers contrasted his tone with that of Escalus, whose 'balanced remarks exaggerate the guilty desperation of Angelo's', as one learner suggested. The brief glimpse at the Duke resuming command and taking control was often only touched on, though better answers did highlight the contrast with Angelo's anxiety, as well as 'his manipulation of his courtiers to the exclusion of Angelo and even Escalus', as one learner noted. More attention was given to Isabella and Mariana, their relationship and Isabella's 'evident nervousness', with a few learners noting that 'Friar Peter has taken over the Duke's previous role, dodging between the characters, organising and encouraging', according to one candidate. Good answers explored the dramatic methods in detail, often noticing the tone and language, as well as the 'sense of bustle and excitement created by Shakespeare's gathering the protagonists together before the big final showdown', as one essay argued. Very good answers integrated such close analysis into a more expansive view of the play and Shakespeare's concerns, often with supporting quotation and a sense of the wider contexts.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

This was not a popular text in the drama section, with learners generally choosing the **(a)** essay option.

- (a)** Every response was able to find relevant material from the play with which to discuss the Duchess. Weaker answers summarised what happened to her, often in detail, with better answers at this level selecting some key events to focus on. Popular choices were her proposal to Antonio, her subsequent marriage to him, her discussions with her brothers and her death scene, with more competent answers noting how Webster uses such dramatic moments to 'reveal different aspects of her character', as one essay suggested. Better answers explored these contrasting aspects more analytically and were often able to find apposite quotations to support their arguments. Other good answers were alive to the dramatic qualities of, for example, her death scene, noting how Webster 'contrasts the violence and horror of Bosola and his actions with her dignity and elegance', though others argued that she is 'rash and foolish in her words and actions, especially when Webster puts her against her corrupt and manipulative brothers', as one noted. Good answers developed arguments around a range of contrasts: political violence and domestic harmony, purity and corruption, youthful optimism and experienced cynicism were popular and rewarding choices. Very good answers particularly focused on Webster's dramatic methods and how he used them to 'shape' the audience response, with language, imagery and contrasting dramatic moods often well explored, and with carefully chosen specific textual references in support.
- (b)** There were only a handful of responses to this question. Nearly every response was aware of the role of Antonio generally but the other characters in the extract were not clearly identified and discussed. Consequently, the reason why Antonio's property was being given away and the significance of to whom it was eventually given was not considered. Contextualisation tended to be very brief and often generalised. Better answers were able to see how the corruption of the court was being 'contrasted to the honesty of a few good men', as one learner wrote. There was generally some awareness of the 'dangerous course' that Antonio was about to take with the Cardinal, though also some evident confusion as to whether the Duchess was in fact now dead and whether Antonio knew of it. Only a very few responses considered any dramatic methods in detail, often language and contrasting characters and these essays usually were more successful.

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section A**. Over half of the learners chose this text, with about an even split between the two options.

- (a)** Nearly every response had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select relevant material to answer the question. Weaker answers tended to summarise the various relationships, often in detail, though at times with only an implicit recognition of the conflict between the characters. Better answers at this level were able to identify and list different kinds of conflict, often with supporting narratives to exemplify the nature of the conflict. Other basic responses distinguished different kinds of conflict within a single relationship, often Brick and Maggie's, though Big Mama and Big Daddy were also popular choices. More competent responses considered ways in which conflict created drama, how 'Williams develops the plot through Maggie and Brick's sexual problems and the siblings' battle for Big Daddy's wealth', as one learner argued. More developed answers explored other conflicts: Big Daddy's battle with cancer, Brick's internal conflicts over his sexuality and Maggie's conflict with her poor background were popular and fruitful points for discussion. The most successful responses concentrated on how Williams presents the various conflicts, such as his methods of characterisation, the setting in Brick and Maggie's bedroom, the use of stage directions and his choice of language. Few learners though were confident in analysing Williams's linguistic choices, though much was made of the play's title and how it 'reflected Maggie's constant state of social and mental conflict', as one learner argued. Very good responses were able to support analytical points with appropriate quotation and reference to the text, with some able to integrate interesting contextual arguments about post-war American cultural attitudes and the role of women in the nuclear family.

- (b) This was the most popular drama question in **Section A** and there were many very good responses. Nearly every response had opinions to offer about Brick and Maggie and their relationship, with some placing these final moments in the context of the wider play. Weaker answers often summarised what had happened to Brick and Maggie in the rest of the play and then speculated on what happened after the curtain has fallen, often showing personal engagement with the dramatic situation. Better answers based their views clearly on what was said, with many noting Brick's echo of Big Daddy's words to Big Mama, though opinion was evenly split as to whether this was a positive or negative hint offered by Williams about his two main characters. More competent answers tended to recognise the 'unresolved nature of the ending', as one learner put it. There were good arguments made for Maggie being successful in her seduction, though other learners saw Brick as beyond her now he 'had found his click and had nothing to say', as one suggested. Maggie's domination in this scene was well explored, with some good analyses made of her actions as well as her words. Other good responses analysed Williams's use of stage directions carefully. Only a minority of learners considered the impact of Big Mama's brief entrance, though the context to it was generally well explored. Very good answers were able to find an effective balance between detailed analysis of specific moments in the passage and reference to the wider text. Answers at this level were always aware of the 'audience' as well as offering a personal response, and there was a wide range of possible interpretations seen, with the best arguments supported by detailed analysis of the passage, as well as thoughtful references to the wider text.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was a minority choice of text in the poetry section with most learners choosing the option (b) passage question.

- (a) There were only a few answers offered to this question. Most learners were able to choose relevant poems on which to base their responses. Popular choices were *Phenomenal Woman*, *Where We Belong*, *A Duet* and *Still I Rise*. Weaker answers summarised their selected poems, often with only basic knowledge and understanding, forcing a few to use the set poem from the passage question. Other weak answers did show how Angelou talked about women in her poems but did not consider either her presentation of the personas or their experiences. Competent answers selected wisely, choosing poems which offered contrasting experiences and attitudes, with some sound discussions comparing, for example, 'the positive attitudes in *Phenomenal Woman* with the violence and conflict of *A Kind of Love, Some Say*', as one essay suggested. Other sound answers discussed how Angelou contrasted youth and age, women abused with women in control of their destinies as well as women's experiences with and in contrast to men's. Overall, there were only a very few learners who could confidently explore Angelou's poetic choices, but those who did and could support their points with appropriate quotation did well.
- (b) This was a relatively popular poetry question, with most learners showing at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the meaning of the poem. Some very weak answers were insecure in their knowledge, suggesting the poem was being treated as an unseen, leading to limited responses, particularly in terms of meaning and understanding. Better answers at this level had a clearer view of the poem, 'as if the speaker is writing a letter to her lover', as one suggested. Others could identify 'the different ways the speaker looks at time and place, as a way of explaining the depth of their love', as one learner argued, though some contrasting responses thought the 'speaker desperate, perhaps with some terrible illness'. More competent responses focused on Angelou's methods, often exploring her use of 'the language of love, starting with an endearment', as one learner noticed. The short phrases, the soft sounds and the gentle tone were well analysed in more successful answers, though only very good responses could link this poem to her presentation of relationships elsewhere in the selection. Where such references were linked to specific moments in the given poem with appropriate quotation and some recognition of the wider contexts, the responses did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in the poetry section with only a few answers seen and most of those on the option (b) passage question.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Nearly every learner was able to place this passage in its appropriate context, immediately before the entrance of the Green Knight. Weaker answers spent too much time in providing the background context of the passage, often summarising the whole poem. Better answers at this level did focus on the passage and King Arthur, offering relevant opinions on Arthur's character and behaviour, as well as their view of his court. Sounder responses saw how Armitage's description created 'a picture of harmony and comfort, with Arthur in control', all of which 'was to be shattered when the Green Knight appears', as one learner argued. More confident answers developed such arguments by looking closely at Armitage's choices, particularly language and imagery, and their effects on the reader's response to Arthur himself. The presentation of the feast was often contrasted with the feasts in Lord Bertilak's castle, with most learners thinking the 'restraint and decorum of Arthur's court suggested its superiority', as one essay explained. More successful answers were able to integrate such wider text references into their analysis of the set passage. However, only a very few responses could confidently explore Armitage's alliterative verse and its effects. Those essays that did, with appropriate quotation from both passage and wider text, did very well.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

This was the second most popular poetry text in this session, with most the learners who chose the text opting for the passage **Question (b)**

- (a) Nearly every learner was able to select relevant poems on which to base their response. Popular choices were *Holy Thursday*, *The Lamb*, *The Shepherd*, *The Chimney Sweeper*, *The Tyger* and *London*. Basic responses summarised their chosen poems and explained what they showed about religion at the time Blake was writing. Better answers at least implicitly considered how he 'portrays religion through the people and what they do, and do not do, for the poor and needy', as one learner summarised it. More competent answers chose contrasting poems which enabled them to develop their arguments and to explore more of Blake's range and scope in his portrayal of religion. Those who considered his poetic methods often focused on language and tone, contrasting, for example, 'the gently idyllic language and effects of *The Shepherd*,' with the 'harsh desperation of the lives depicted in *London* or *The Chimney Sweeper*,' as one essay argued. More successful answers were able to discriminate between, for example, Blake's portrayal of some religious figures such as in *Holy Thursday* with how the poor responded to God and the countryside. Where these answers supported the arguments with apposite quotation and some awareness of the wider context within which Blake was writing, they invariably did very well.
- (b) This was a popular choice and nearly every answer had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem. Weaker answers often attempted a verse-by-verse summary of the poem, with some at least implicit awareness of Blake's choices of language and verse form. These were often considered to be like a 'child's nursery rhyme' or even a 'lullaby', though perhaps ignoring the darker content of the poem. At this level, there was at least some recognition of the wider text and the contrasting poems of innocence and experience. More competent answers developed their responses with this in mind, exploring the contrasting emotions of Lyca and her mother, for example, with some attempting to see the poem as an 'allegory of losing innocence' or 'breaking free of parental influence', despite Lyca having 'told' 'only seven summers'. More successful answers contrasted the presentation of humans and animals, noting how the 'predatory and threatening animals become saviours and protectors to Lyca', as one learner argued. The most successful answers had a secure understanding of the poem on which to base their interpretation and were able to explore Blake's poetic methods with confidence, showing awareness of poetic form and rhythm and their effects. Where such analyses were supported by

pertinent quotations as well as some awareness of the wider text and appropriate contexts, the answers did very well.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular poetry text, with over half of the entry choosing it. The vast majority chose the option **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** Nearly all of the few learners who chose this question were able to find relevant poems to discuss. Popular choices were *The Darkling Thrush*, *The Buck in the Snow*, *Eel Tail* and *The Stars Go Over the Lonely Ocean*. More basic responses summarised their chosen poems with only implicit awareness of the ways the poets presented living creatures. Learners who chose contrasting poems were able to cover a wider range of concerns in their essays and tended to be more successful. More competent answers focused on the poetic methods employed by the poets to achieve their effects. Though learners had a sound appreciation of language and imagery, only a few were able to confidently discuss other poetic methods such as rhythm and verse form and these essays were often more successful. Good responses developed the arguments about the presentation of living creatures and the poetic concerns they revealed through detailed reference to the poems and in the most successful answers a secure understanding of the relevant contexts.
- (b)** This was by far the most popular question on the paper. Nearly all learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning and relevant contexts, such as the poet's background or the appropriate economic downturn. A few very weak answers however were less well prepared and approached the poem as unseen, limiting the depth and the development of their interpretations. The title was a secure starting point for many responses, recognising the 'Marxist, anti-capitalism stance of the poet from the start', as one learner suggested. Basic answers retold the story of the brother-in-law in their own words, often with some personal engagement and views 'on the rights and wrongs of his situation', as one suggested. More competent responses saw the brother-in-law as 'an everyman figure, representing hard-workers and their failure to live the American Dream', as one essay noted. Other learners saw him as a victim 'of cold and callous corporate greed', with some developing interesting interpretations of how Ward contrasted 'the human family warmth of simple American activities with the capitalist exploiters of workers generally'. More successful answers looked closely at Ward's poetic choices, the colloquial language, the 'prose-like quality of the verse and the verse-form', and his use of symbols to 'show the success (Harley and steak) and failure (food stamps and bowed head)', as one essay summarised it. Only a minority of learners discussed the final four lines, which was a limitation in exploring the full impact of Ward's presentation. Those essays which were able to integrate a response to these lines into their discussion, along with a clear and accurate sense of appropriate contexts often did very well.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

This was a minority choice of text in the prose section, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Most of the few learners who chose this question had at least a basic knowledge of the passage and some understanding of Desai's concerns. Basic answers retold the narrative in their own words, with some less structured responses more or less ignoring the passage in order to focus on Biju's part in the wider novel. More focused answers explored some of Desai's concerns, with exploitation of migrant workers, abusive owners and 'unhygienic, squalid living conditions' all popular choices. More competent answers focused on Biju's 'largely negative experiences', as one learner noted, with better answers at this level aware of some of Desai's methods. The interplay of dialogue and description, his language choices and 'the use of telling symbols such as the photograph of Biju's parents, like ghosts' were often soundly discussed. Others noted how Desai emphasises the poverty of Biju's existence, for example 'his few possessions amid the wealth of

America,' or the 'filth and horror of living among rats actually in the restaurant', as one learner put it. Good answers developed such points by detailed analysis of Desai's narrative structures, particularly the narrative voice and the 'occasional hint of humour', as one noted, though others explored the contrasting 'depictions of the rats and the workers, which dehumanises Biju and his colleagues into worse than animals', as one learner argued. The most successful answers supported such points with apposite quotation from the passage and appropriate reference to the wider text and contexts.

Question 10

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was the most popular text in the prose section with almost half of the entry choosing it. The vast majority of learners opted for the **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** Nearly every learner was able to select relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers retold episodes from the novel, badging them as a 'memories' but with little awareness of McEwan as the writer or his exploring 'memory' in the novel. More successful answers were able to discuss the part memory plays in each section of the novel, from the narrator's view of events in the first part, to Briony's 'reconstruction of the war in the later part', as one learner suggested. More competent responses discussed the significance of memory to the novel's narrative structure. For example: 'He presents the narrator in part 1 as Briony's genuine memory', though for other learners 'Briony perhaps changes what she remembers through storytelling, which is powerful enough to make her past wrongdoing right', as one learner argued. Other learners emphasised Robbie's memory during the war section, particularly Cecilia's 'come back to me', with, for example, one learner suggesting that 'McEwan shows the reader how Robbie's memories of Cecilia are able to give him peace in a place far from peace.' The most successful responses were able to deconstruct such ideas in the light of the novel's overarching narrative structure, navigating carefully between the various voices 'from Robbie and Cecilia, through Briony to McEwan himself as the real novelist, using his memory to create the novel', as one succinctly put it. Where such arguments were supported by specific quotation from or reference to the text, the responses did very well.
- (b)** Most learners were aware of the situation in the given passage, though only a few responses were able to give a precise context and these were often the most successful answers. Basic responses summarised the passage as Robbie's return with the lost boys to the family and the policemen waiting to arrest him, often retelling the story of his relationship with Cecilia and his false conviction for rape. More competent answers considered McEwan's presentation, particularly the language and tone, which for some learners 'created a nightmarish quality, in which Robbie's triumphant return is turned into a horrific event', as one response put it. Others noted the shift from the 'disturbing description to Briony's own view', and how her 'manipulative narration' at this point is 'designed to make his arrest seem inevitable'. Other responses noted how 'his care for the boys juxtaposes the accusation of violently hurting another child'. Such arguments were developed in the most successful responses, where the 'key issue of perception and reality' was often discussed. This led neatly into some perceptive interpretations about 'unreliable narrators' and Briony's role, both here and in the wider novel. Better answers also referred to 'Robbie's actual tragic future, which increases the emotional effect of this passage', and others also emphasised 'how McEwan presents Briony's childish but dangerous misconceptions through language and imagery here'. The most successful responses supported such points with detailed reference to the passage, alongside a secure grasp of the context and the wider novel.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

This was a minority choice of text in the prose section, with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b)** Almost all learners had at least a basic knowledge and understanding of the story on which to base their response, with weaker answers tending to summarise the main events in detail, with a consequent loss of focus on the passage itself. More successful answers at this level had opinions

about the narrator and were able to support them by reference to the passage. Her 'isolation and anxiety' were often noted, with some arguing for her 'descent into madness'. Other straightforward responses summarised her relationship with husband, John, seeing her as either 'abused and bullied' or 'cared for sensitively' depending on the learner's overview of the story. More competent responses commented on Gilman's choices, which for many 'create a gothic atmosphere in the story', as one learner suggested. The first-person narrative was a fruitful discussion point, enabling learners to develop arguments about 'unreliable narrators' and 'appearance and reality'. Such points helped some successful answers explore the gothic tropes in more detail, for example, the secluded house, the threatening relationship, the heroine entrapped in a locked room and 'the ghostliness of the situation', as one learner put it. The most successful responses supported such points with close reference to the passage and appropriate reference to the wider text, and often developed perceptive analyses of language, imagery and especially narrative structures, with one learner suggesting, for example, that 'the fragmentary nature of her thoughts, broken up by half-memories and dialogue, suggest that the narrator is descending into madness'. Other good responses commented on the paragraph structures, the way that the narrative voice is set against the rationality of the husband and Gilman's 'language choices'. Where learners explored the effects of such choices, the responses often did very well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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

LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8695/23 Drama, Poetry and Prose
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Key messages

1. Learners answering poetry passage questions are advised to offer an overview of the set poem as a framework for their intended analytical points.
2. Learners should plan their essays with a clear structure which enables them to keep their response focused on the question.

General comments

The large majority of learners this session showed at least a sound knowledge of the set texts. There were only a very few rubric errors with learners not understanding the optionality on the paper. Centres are reminded 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 were some candidates with expressive weaknesses which can impede communication at this level.

There were responses to nearly all of 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 Tennessee Williams's *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* in **Section A: Drama**, the selection of poems from *Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2* in **Section B: Poetry** and Ian McEwan's *Atonement* in **Section C: Prose**.

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

1. Some learners choosing the **(b)** passage question on one of the poetry texts in **Section B** introduce their essays by listing some specific points of poetic analysis which they have spotted in the set poem. Typically, this list will include such specific elements as assonance, caesura and end-stopped lines. The essay then provides examples of and a brief commentary on these poetic methods but does not consider the effects of these methods on the meaning of the poem as a whole, limiting the overall interpretation in the essay. More successful essays will often offer an overview of how the learner interprets the poem with particular notice taken of the precise wording of the question. This enables them to develop any analysis as a support to their interpretation and as part of a structured response to the question, rather than as a series of disconnected points about the style.
2. In the 9695 syllabus, **Assessment Objective 4 Communication** states that learners should 'communicate a relevant, structured and supported response'. Many essays, especially but not only those in the lower levels of assessment, would improve their overall success by having a clearer direction by which the learner's response to the question is developed to a clear conclusion. 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 can become repetitive and unfocused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Drama

Question 1

ERROL JOHN: *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl*

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

Question 2

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE: *Measure for Measure*

This was a popular choice of text with most learners choosing the **(b)** passage option.

- (a)** Nearly every learner selected relevant material from the text with which to address the task. Weaker answers tended to summarise the various sexual relationships in the play, often showing detailed basic knowledge and understanding. Better answers at this level discussed contrasting situations such as Claudio/Juliet and Angelo/Isabella, with an implicit awareness of the dramatic presentation. All learners had relevant opinions and often had personal engagement with 'the clear hypocrisy of the rulers' and how they 'showed little awareness of how their decisions affected the poorer people', as one learner summarised it. More competent responses considered the 'different attitudes', with many noting the contrast between the 'religious figures such as Isabella and Angelo (at least at the start) and the sex workers such as Pompey and Mistress Overdone', as one essay noted. Others explored Shakespeare's use of irony and more rarely comedy as methods by which 'the serious concerns were made more human', as one essay suggested. Where these arguments were supported by direct reference to the play, the essays became increasingly successful. The ambivalent attitudes of the Duke were seen to reflect his general ambiguity in the play, so that learners were divided between seeing him as a 'weak hypocrite when it comes to sex', and a 'merciful leader who understands and accepts people's sinful nature'. Answers which looked closely at Shakespeare's methods of presenting these different attitudes often did very well. Language, again often seen as contrasted between the coldness of Angelo and the bawdiness of Lucio for example, was often well explored, though dramatic action, such as the public shaming of Claudio and Juliet, were also popular discussion points. Essays which used supporting apposite quotations and appropriate relevant contexts always did well and learners generally showed real engagement with the issues, noting that 'the problems of sexual behaviour and attitudes dramatised in the play are still as relevant today as they were 400 years ago'.
- (b)** Nearly every response had some knowledge and understanding of the context to the passage: Isabella pleading for the life of her brother. Weaker answers tended to summarise the background and often the later events following on from this passage, with a consequent loss of focus on the specifics of the task. Basic answers had some knowledge of Angelo's role in the play and often strong opinions about his character and actions. These again distracted some learners from focusing on the particulars of this passage. Sounder answers saw how Shakespeare uses Isabella's words to gradually reveal the changes in Angelo, with some exploring the effects of the asides and his closing soliloquy in detail. Better answers analysed the language closely, often noting the use of religious diction, for example, as well as tracing the development of Angelo's thoughts through words such as 'desire', 'foully', 'temptation' and 'strumpet'. Good responses were able to explore the development in Angelo, 'his shifting state of mind' as one suggested, through his language and imagery. Other good responses were alive to the dramatic situation, seeing it as 'a sort of court or tribunal', and how Angelo's 'slipping into lust and desire mirrored the very crime that Isabella's brother committed', as one learner argued. Very good answers developed such ideas through analysing the tone and mood, the role of Lucio and 'the shift from the formal courtroom to Angelo's interior deliberations', as one learner put it. Answers which were rooted in the context to the passage and were able to integrate wider text references into details drawn from the passage, often did very well, particularly where appropriate wider contexts were also used to support the arguments offered.

Question 3

JOHN WEBSTER: *The Duchess of Malfi*

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

Question 4

TENNESSEE WILLIAMS: *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*

This was the most popular text from **Section B**, with over two thirds of the learners choosing it, the majority selecting the passage option **(b)**.

- (a)** Nearly all learners had strong opinions about Maggie and her role in the play. Weaker answers tended to summarise her story, particularly with Brick and Skipper, often in detail, but were rarely able to show how her actions shaped the audience's responses to her. Better answers at this level selected what they considered to be the significant relationships and actions in her role. More straightforward answers approached the task by listing her various relationships and commenting on what they revealed about her. For example, 'she is desperate for Brick's attention, sucks up to Big Daddy to get his inheritance and is jealous of Mae and her many children', as one learner suggested. More competent answers considered some of Williams's methods, noting for example how he uses stage directions to 'outline her changing moods and sudden shifts of attack', as one learner put it. Other sound responses developed the relationship approach, exploring 'the contrasts that Williams creates by how she responds to Mae and her children ('no-neck monsters') and Skipper (a rival for Brick's affection)' as one essay argued. More confident answers considered her language and imagery as a 'key method used by Williams to reveal the depth and range of her personality', as one suggested, with some learners noting her humour, her sensitivity to Big Mama and her manipulation of Brick in the closing scenes. Very good answers often had a clear sense of the drama, how 'Williams exposes different facets of her over time, often contrasting her to those around her, so that she is seen as more feminine and seductive, for example, because of her interactions with the 'monster of fertility', Mae', one essay successfully argued. Very good answers always supported such arguments with apposite quotation from the text and had a secure grasp of relevant contexts, such as the role of women in the USA in the 1950s.
- (b)** Nearly every learner had relevant opinions about Big Mama around which to structure their response. Weaker answers retold her story throughout the play, often in secure detail, but with too little focus on the passage itself. Better answers were always aware of the context to the extract, Big Daddy's cancer diagnosis, though some learners were confused as to the contents of Gooper's brief case and why Big Mama was upset about it. Basic answers often adopted a line-by-line approach, though this at times meant the final exchange with Brick was either ignored or treated cursorily. More straightforward responses noted her 'mimicking of Big Daddy in words and deeds', which for some showed 'her lack of confidence in her own authority', as one learner put it. Her contrasting responses to Brick and Gooper were often well explored, her 'favouritism for her youngest revealed here as the root cause of Gooper's hostility to the family and particularly Brick', as one essay argued. More competent answers considered Williams's presentation in detail, often discussing the range of her roles here, 'a mother, a wife, an authority figure and above all a protector of the family', as one learner summarised it. Other good answers analysed how she often 'reminisces about happier times, such as Brick as a child, and tries to re-establish harmony in the family'. Successful responses explored Williams's language, her 'shifting tones that reveal her shifting emotions as she comes to terms with death', as one learner argued. Other good answers analysed the stage directions, the dramatic action, particularly Gooper 'tense with sibling rivalry' and her reaction to Maggie's lie about pregnancy. For some learners her acceptance of this was evidence of her gullibility, though for others it showed her 'love of family and desire to have good news to combat the 'black thing' in their lives', as one learner suggested. Where such arguments were supported by quotations from the passage and appropriate reference to the wider text, the answers did very well.

Section B: Poetry

Question 5

MAYA ANGELOU: *And Still I Rise*

This was the second most popular poetry text, with the majority of learners choosing the **(b)** passage question.

- (a) Popular choices of poems were *Just for A Time*, *Through the Inner City to the Suburbs*, *Men and My Arkansas*. More basic answers summarised their chosen poems, often in detail, and success was determined by how well the supporting comments were shaped to the task, Angelou's exploration of change. More competent answers often demonstrated sound knowledge of the poems and Angelou's background, integrating contextual points appropriately into the responses. Societal, personal and relationship changes were the most common areas for discussion, with many noting the significance of the changes in attitudes to and acceptance of racial issues during Angelou's lifetime. More successful answers, while maintaining the focus on the key concerns, also analysed how she explored the changes, looking at a range of poetic methods. Angelou's language and use of imagery and rhythm were popular choices, with very successful answers offering developed interpretations of their effects on the reader. Few learners were as confident when discussing poetic form, rhyme and poetic voice, but those that did tackle these methods, and were able to support their arguments with appropriate quotation, did very well.
- (b) This was a popular question, and most learners had interesting and engaged opinions about the poem, and Angelou generally, on which to base their response. Some weak answers found the poetic structure and voice challenging, leading to misinterpretations about 'Job' and 'Father' for example. Nearly every answer recognised how 'the speaker is appealing to God for help', as one suggested. Basic responses saw the speaker as a 'specific person, perhaps Angelou herself, who was having a bad time', as one learner wondered, with some finding biographical references in the detail of the poem. More competent answers had sound knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning, the 'patience of the speaker set against the unanswering God', as one learner expressed it. More successful responses at this level focused as well on Angelou's poetic methods, particularly language and imagery, with many noting 'the tone of desperation she creates', as one learner suggested. More confident answers recognised the 'universality of the speaker, and the significance of the cry for help, in the context of racial discrimination', as one learner argued. Others noted how the 'lack of heavenly response, united with the misery of the earthly existence, creates the anguish in the overall situation of the oppressed'. Others analysed the effect of the religious language and the implications of the biblical references to Job, the mountains and the rivers. Where these interpretations were supported by some contextual references, whether biographical or textual, the answers often did very well.

Question 6

SIMON ARMITAGE: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

This was the least popular text in the poetry section, with most learners choosing the passage **(b)** option.

- (a) Most learners were able to select relevant material with which to address the task. Some weaker answers offered a general response on chivalry in the poem generally, with only intermittent references to the green knight. More basic answers tended to retell the story of the Green Knight's challenge, the response of Sir Gawain and the reveal about his identity at the end of the poem, with only implicit relevance to the given task. More successful answers at this level did have some opinions on chivalry and how the Green Knight 'challenges Sir Gawain's and the reader's assumptions about what makes a chivalrous knight', as one learner suggested. More competent answers discussed him in relation to Sir Gawain, and less frequently King Arthur, comparing the more 'relaxed and lively atmosphere in Lord Bertilak's castle', to the 'austere and rather stiff court in Camelot'. Other sound responses noted how this was 'noticeable in Sir Gawain himself who becomes more of a man and less of robot under Bertilak's influence'. Better answers were knowledgeable about chivalry and were often able to draw detailed and perceptive comparisons between the two protagonists as 'representatives of two different kinds of chivalry', with some essays contrasting 'Bertilak's old rough pagan Green Knight with the more refined and Christian Sir Gawain', as one learner argued. The most successful essays were able to look at Armitage's poetic

methods in detail, particularly his use of descriptive language and imagery, and explore how the Green Knight is 'presented as a challenge to Sir Gawain's notions and ultimately becomes his teacher', as one learner argued. Essays at this level often had a secure understanding of relevant contexts and were always able to support points with specific reference to the text.

- (b) This question was often answered well. Weaker responses were at times unsure of the context of the passage, with some essays for example assuming this was Sir Gawain returning to Arthur's court in Camelot. Basic answers did realise that he has 'arrived at Lord Bertilak's castle, not realising he is the green knight', though some answers at this level did move away from the passage into retelling the story of the Green Knight more generally. Sounder answers were able to explore the context noting the 'contrast in the castle with the cold wilderness where Gawain was previously lost', as one essay put it. Other sound answers recognised this was 'an exciting and important even for the castle dwellers', with some developing this into exploring how their reaction 'increases the reader's awareness of the importance and reputation of Sir Gawain to the outside world', as one learner argued, 'making him an icon of chivalry and knighthood.' The reaction of the host was often explored in more successful answers, along with some of the descriptive details, such as the listing of exotic foods and the clothes given to Sir Gawain. Successful answers looked closely at the language and were able to find contrasts with the Christmas feast in Camelot, some learners finding Bertilak's castle 'excessive and over-the-top in its incredible generosity', as one noted. Other good answers compared the 'welcome of the Green Knight in Camelot to what happens here', though for some it is the attitude of Sir Gawain 'humble and desperate after his journey compared to the arrogance of the green knight', that made the difference. The most successful answers explored Armitage's methods in detail, especially his use of lists, the language of excess and the subtle hints of the challenges to come, in the 'language of love'. However very few considered Armitage's alliterative verse or the poetic rhythms, beyond mentioning the bob and wheels in the passage. This limited some responses in terms of the analysis offered as it is such a key element of Armitage's presentation.

Question 7

WILLIAM BLAKE: Selected Poems from *Songs of Innocence and Experience*

This was a minority choice of poetry text, with most learners choosing the passage (b) option.

- (a) There were not enough responses to this question to be able to make a general comment on performance.
- (b) Most learners were able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the poem's meaning on which to base their response. A few weak answers seemed to be responding to an unseen poem and consequently were unsure of the situation or the appropriate contexts. More basic responses were able to consider the infant and the relationship between the 'mother and child' which some saw 'as a loving and caring one', though others were swayed by the 'weeping mother' into assuming there 'was some tragedy unfolding such as the child being sick or ill', as one learner speculated. More competent answers were able to explore the 'poetic voice of the mother, the image of the angel watching carefully, and the sense of holiness that surrounds them all', as one learner put it. Other sound responses noted the language, especially the repetition of 'sweet' and explored its possible effects. More successful answers were confident in addressing the 'nursery rhyme, almost ballad like verse form', as well as the 'simple, repetitive rhymes and linguistic repetitions, all of which help to create the mood of a nursery and its innocence', as one argued. Good answers were knowledgeable about appropriate contexts, linking this poem to others in the selection which considered childhood and infants. Many discussed Blake's use of symbols, with some perceptive discussions on how 'the symbols of innocence here are in stark contrast to the sinister and dark symbols of the chimney sweep poems', as one learner argued. Very good answers explored such details as Blake's use of pronouns, sleep and religion, though here 'it is both gentle and protecting, compared to *Holy Thursday* and its evil humans destroying innocence', as one argued. Essays at this level often supported their interpretations by detailed and appropriate reference to both the poem and the wider text and were comfortable in exploring the full range of Blake's poetic methods.

Question 8

Songs of Ourselves, Volume 2

This was the most popular poetry text, with the majority of learners choosing the option **(b)** passage question.

- (a)** Nearly every learner was able to select two relevant poems with which to address the task and had at least straightforward opinions on the powerful emotions presented in their chosen poems. Popular choices were *Renouncement*, *I hear an Army...*, *Australia 1970*, *an afternoon nap*, *Winter Song* and *In the Park*. Basic responses summarised the two poems, often in detail and with some understanding of the emotions revealed. At this level, the required comparison was implicit rather than overt and success was often determined by how much the learner could consider the presentation of the emotions, as well as explaining them. More competent responses focused at least equally on presentation, with some responses listing various poetic methods in the essay's introduction and then offering comments on the poets' use of those methods. Popular discussion points were language, imagery and tone, though some learners focused more on such poetic details as enjambement, caesuras and 'end-stopped' lines. These essays were generally less successful, as they rarely enabled the learner to show much understanding of the poem as a whole or to explore the poets' concerns in depth. More confident learners were also able to discuss other poetic methods such as rhyme and rhythm, though only a few seemed to be aware of the poetic voice and its effects, despite often referring to 'the speaker'. At this level there was always secure knowledge and understanding of the poems' meanings and the poetic concerns that informed them. The most successful responses had sophisticated views of the two poems, were able to develop the comparison seamlessly throughout the essay and were alive to the nuance of the specific poetic choices that either distinguished or connected the poets' approaches to their poetic concerns. Where such approaches were supported by accurate quotation and appropriate contexts the answers did very well.
- (b)** This was a very popular choice with nearly every response able to offer some opinions on the speaker's attitude to her mother. Weaker answers were often insecure in knowledge and understanding of the basic meaning and concerns of the poem, with some confused interpretations offered and misreadings of the middle section as an actual biography of the mother. Basic responses did have the requisite knowledge and were able to summarise the poet's shifting attitudes to the mother, though with little awareness of the changing tone, for example. Better answers at this level did look at some of the poetic methods, such as language and 'the poetic voice of the grieving child', as one learner suggested. More competent answers developed their interpretations through examining the language and imagery in detail, particularly the opening verses where 'shocking white ambulance' and 'ivy-mother' were often well analysed. The final verses were generally less well dealt with, with Beer's use of generalisations about other poets' use of 'a lost woman' not always clearly grasped. Confident answers could trace the meaning through to the final verse where 'the real identity of the lost woman as the speaker/poet is revealed', as one summarised it. Very good responses were sensitive to the shifting tone of the poem and were able to explore how 'the speaker develops through her relationship with her dead mother from a shocked child to full self-awareness of her mother's true gift to her', as one learner argued. Verse form, voice and the 'intermittent rhyme' were well analysed at this level and the essays often integrated appropriate contexts to support the learners' interpretations and insights.

Section C: Prose

Question 9

KIRAN DESAI: *The Inheritance of Loss*

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

Question 10

IAN McEWAN: *Atonement*

This was a popular choice of prose text in this session, with a range of answer seen on both options.

- (a)** Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge of the text from which to select material to address the task. Weaker answers summarised the events of the first part of the novel, often in detail, with some interesting opinions offered on 'how their wealth leads to their snobbery, shown by how they protect Marshall but turn against Robbie', as one suggested. Others thought their life

'very dull and conventional, with endless small talk', though others noted the 'sinister undercurrents in the arguments, the violence and ultimately the rape of Lola'. More competent answers considered McEwan's presentation, looking for example at the different 'attitudes that are revealed at mealtimes, creating tension', as one learner suggested. Language and dialogue were often soundly explored but only the more confident responses discussed the narrative voices and the effects of 'the revelation of Briony's role as a character and a creator', as one learner noted. Better answers were comfortable in discussing the social and political concerns, both within the novel and as contextual points. This helped some very good answers to offer developed interpretations of life in the Tallis household. These were particularly successful when the arguments were supported by precise reference to the text and a secure understanding of McEwan's narrative structures.

- (b) Nearly every learner recognised the context to this passage and were able to explain Robbie's situation. Weaker answers were distracted into retelling much of his preceding story, with a consequent loss of focus on the detail of the passage. Basic answers retold the events in the passage, noting for example that the 'major is being mocked both by the men and by McEwan', whereas others explored how 'McEwan makes Robbie's view of the situation the one that reader's get,' as one learner put it. More competent answers developed points like these by looking closely at McEwan's use of language and dialogue, 'the dreamy quality of Robbie's recognition of the danger, leading to a sudden terrifying burst of action', as one essay summarised it. More confident answers explored the effects of McEwan's choices. For example, 'how the short sentences in the dialogue become much longer and slower as the reader is moved into Robbie's place', and how 'we experience the horror and yet almost surreal nature of war and its violence through Robbie's eyes.' Very good answers were able to link this passage to the wider text effectively, showing its significance, with some answers able to explore the effects of the narrative structure here to the later revelations from Briony about the 'reality of Robbie's wartime experiences'.

Question 11

Stories of Ourselves, Volume 1

This was a popular choice of prose text, with most learners opting for the essay (a) question.

- (a) Nearly every learner had at least a basic knowledge of two stories on which to base their response. Popular choices were *To Da-Duh, in Memoriam, The Son's Veto, The People Before, Games at Twilight* and *The Yellow Wallpaper*. More basic responses retold the events of their chosen stories, often in detail and with some understanding of the family tensions within the narratives. Success at this level was determined by how well the selected material was shaped to the task, though in most cases the 'comparison' element was only implicit. More competent responses tended to choose contrasting stories so that the tension between Sophy and Randolph for example was naturally contrasted to that of Da-Duh and her grand-daughter. There was also awareness at this level of the writer's methods. For example, how the first-person narrator contrasted with the omniscient third person narrator. Other sound answers considered language and dialogue in particular, with answers becoming more successful as the effects of the writers' choices were demonstrated by apposite quotation and analytical commentary. Contextual points were generally rare in these essays, but learners who could integrate such ideas into their overall interpretations often did very well.
- (b) This was a minority choice. Nearly every answer showed a basic knowledge of the story on which to base their interpretation of the given passage. Weaker essays tended to retell the whole narrative, including the tragic ending, with success determined by how well comments about the passage and its significance were integrated into the discussion. More competent answers kept the focus firmly on the passage, looking carefully for example at how Thorpe 'develops the characters slowly and gently', and shows 'the tenderness of young love', through his language choices. Other sound answers noted the use of time and how 'Thorpe creates suspense particularly over the girl's safety', as one noted, with some linking that to the story's ending. Confident responses looked closely at the narrator's description of the girl, with some perceptive analyses of the effect of the first-person narrator, though some learners were distracted by pondering over the 'unreliable narrator' issue for too long. There were also some excellent explorations of the narrator himself and how 'Thorpe reveals his love for the girl and his personality in small deft strokes', as one learner argued. Very good responses linked their analysis of the passage into considering its significance to the wider text, often with appropriate, brief references and quotations. There was generally little recognition of contexts beyond the wider text, but those that did link comments about the war appropriately often did well.

Question 12

MARK TWAIN: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

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