Teacher notes: exam information

This resource (updated May 2016) provides additional information for the GCSE English Language (8700) exam which will be available for the first time in June 2017 and then November 2017. The November series is intended as a re-sit and any candidates entering in November must be 16 years of age by 31 August of that year.

Question structure

- The questions are differentiated to move from more familiar Assessment Objectives such as AO1 and AO2 through lower tariff questions to more challenging Assessment Objectives such as AO3 and AO4 through higher tariff questions at the end of the paper.
- Not all questions will have bullet points though the sample papers establish a consistent model for which questions include these.
- Students do not always have to use quotations in their answers. They may choose to paraphrase or make other textual references as appropriate.

Reading time and allocation

Students have been notionally allocated 15 minutes reading time within the total time allocation for each paper. They are responsible for their own time management so they may begin writing at any point within the 1hr 45 minutes. Each section of the papers is worth 25% of the overall grade. In deciding how much time to allocate, students should consider the relative weighting of each question. Students should also bear in mind the number of marks allocated for technical accuracy and allow sufficient time for checking their response to the Section B writing question. A guidance sheet on how long to spend on each question is provided in the Prepare to Teach resources on our website.

Length of sources

Sources selected for each paper will typically be between 600-700 words and be similar in demand to those appearing on the sample assessment materials.

Spoken language assessment

The spoken language unit which tests speaking and listening skills is part of teacher- assessed non-exam assessment (NEA). Please see the NEA guide on our website for details.

The assessment will be in a presentation format leading naturally into a Q&A session. In this single task, candidates will also be assessed on their use of spoken Standard English and their ability to respond to questions and feedback.

Section A: reading – general

Reading is assessed in Section A in both papers which, in combination, cover AO1- AO4.

For both papers, AO2 requires that students use relevant subject terminology. The mark scheme indicates a notional hierarchy that rewards students for their use of terminology, for example, increasing from simple use in level 1 to sophisticated and accurate use in level 4.

Each question in Section A assesses a single Assessment Objective or a single strand of an Assessment Objective.

Section B: writing - general

AO6 constitutes 20% of the total marks for the GCSE. The AO6 mark is given for the use of a range of vocabulary and appropriate sentence structures with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar. For each Q5, the number of overall marks for technical accuracy is 16 out of 40 on the writing questions (20% of the overall qualification). Technical accuracy is assessed in the writing tasks in Section B, Q5 in each paper along with AO5 (content and organisation).

Paper 1

See Paper 1 Specimen mark scheme, Specimen question paper and Examiner commentary on sample answers (referred to as 'Specimen Assessment Materials' or SAMS 1) on our website.

Texts

The texts will be extracts from literature prose fiction (such as novels and short stories) and will focus on:

- openings
- endings
- narrative or descriptive passages
- character development
- atmospheric descriptions

Other appropriate and descriptive approaches will also be included. They will be from the 20th or 21st century. All texts will be unseen.

Section A: Reading

Question 1

This question requires students to select information by retrieving and extracting information from the texts. Their responses can be either quotations or paraphrased. However, if students copy out the whole section of the source then they will not have met the requirement of the Assessment Objective and selected information and so cannot be credited.

Question 2

This question, together with Paper 2 Q3, assesses language.

Annotated student responses show the hierarchy of skills that students need to demonstrate to be successful. These can be accessed here.

Bullet points in question 2 and 3

The bullet points are a guide for students, but they do not have specific marks allocated to them. Marks are given for the quality and level of response rather than number of points made.

Question 3

This question assesses structure.

This requires students to respond to the structure of the whole text (the extract reproduced). For example, in the first specimen paper, the extract from 'Jamaica Inn' provided the opportunity to consider the change in focus from the general to the specific, from the driver to the passengers, and from outside to inside the coach. Other features, such as change of time and place, could also be mentioned.

Sentence structure analysis, whilst still appropriate, should only be referenced where students think that such analysis contributes to the structure of the whole, for example, a recurring motif or pattern that informs meaning.

Q3 demands an extended response and we recommend writing in detail about two or three well-chosen structural features.

Question 4

The use of the statement followed by 'to what extent' enables students to evaluate both the statement and text, and is intended to prompt a personal response.

The statement allows students the option of agreeing, partly agreeing, or disagreeing entirely with the statement. The mark scheme rewards students for the quality of their evaluation and will not prescribe one approach over another.

Section B: Writing

Question 5

Students are required to write a creative response linked to the topic or theme of the Source in Section A. They have the opportunity to demonstrate their narrative or descriptive writing skills in response to a written prompt or a visual image.

The question will give a choice of a descriptive and a narrative task, two descriptive or two narrative tasks.

We accept that it is likely that descriptive pieces could well include elements of narrative, and narrative is very likely to include elements of descriptive writing – but the main focus should be descriptive for descriptive writing and narrative for narrative writing.

The statement that precedes Q5 on Paper 1 tells students the audience and purpose of the writing.

Students will be credited for their writing in terms of content and organisation (AO5) and technical accuracy (AO6). A useful skill for students will be to craft their work and leave an appropriate amount of time to check and review their work. See Paper 1 Reading support booklet.

Paper 2

See Paper 2 Specimen mark scheme, Specimen question paper, Specimen insert and Examiner commentary on sample answers on our website.

Overview

The focus for Paper 2 is attitudes/viewpoints/perspectives - looking at how writers have used texts to present a point of view, an argument etc. Correspondingly on Section B, the writing question will ask students to then present their own point of view in a piece of writing.

Texts

There will be two linked texts from different time periods which will be non-fiction and literary non-fiction, such as:

- high-quality journalism
- articles
- reports
- essays
- travel writing
- accounts
- sketches
- letters
- diaries
- autobiography and biographical passages and other appropriate texts.

Over time there will be a range of different types of texts used. They will be primary sources, ie the original texts. One will always be 19th century and the other will either be 20th or 21st century (depending on what has been used in Paper 1) to assess 19th, 20th and 21st century texts across both papers.

The requirements will be for high quality and challenging texts as set out in the GCSE English Language subject criteria published by the DfE. We have produced reading resources and further sample papers which exemplify the types of texts and level of demand that students may expect on both papers. See 19th century resources below.

Section A: Reading

Question 1

This question asks for four correct statements to be chosen from a selection of correct and incorrect statements. If the student chooses more than four

statements, only the first four selected in the order presented will be marked. The actual mechanics of how/what they shade may change depending on what particular method we use – but we will advise students how to respond to this question.

Question 2

To be successful, students need to identify and select only the information that is relevant to the question set. They then need to write, in continuous prose, a summary of the selected information, inferring what they understand from their reading.

See Paper 2 Question 2 Further insights-teaching synthesis

Question 3

This question will always deal with the language part of AO2. It can be set on either Source A or Source B depending which text offers most appropriate examples of language for students to analyse.

Question 4

This question deals with AO3: compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts. This highlights the fact that writers craft their writing deliberately and use a range of techniques and methods in order to achieve their desired effect and create an impact on the reader.

The focus of this question is comparison (AO3). For instance, students may be asked to compare the attitudes of the writers in the two texts.

The comparison in Q4 should be wider reaching than just basic comprehension skills.

The bullet points direct students to consider comparing the writer's methods in both pieces and, as such, the students' responses can include reference to language and structure.

Section B: Writing

Question 5

See paper 2- further insights writing.

Having read a contemporary viewpoint on a topic, as well as a 19th century one, students are provided with a statement that gives them the opportunity to consider their own viewpoint.

There is nothing to stop students referring to the material in Q1-4 if this is relevant, but the response should be their own ideas. If they use material from Q1-4, it should be the students' view of this material and it should support the

point(s) they are trying to make. Students will be rewarded for their ability to produce a written text for a specified audience, purpose and form.

19th century resources

Websites

We have a Reading resource support booklet for Paper 2 on our website.

You could also look at the following websites, all of which have 19th century non- fiction texts:

- The Victorian Web
- The British Library
- The National Archives at Kew.

Text books

We have worked with the following publishers and have approved their text books. We do not recommend one more than the others.

- Cambridge University Press (CUP)
- Oxford University Press (OUP, formerly Nelson Thornes)
- Collins.

New grading system

The first exam series uses a new grading system. Students will be awarded:

- grade from 1 to 9, with 9 being the highest
- U, where performance is below the minimum required to pass the GCSE.

Please see our video, which explains the proposed GCSE grades 1-9.

Ofqual also provides some useful guidance about what levels on the new grading criteria equate to old A-F boundaries.

Comparing grades

We cannot say what marks (out of a maximum of 160 across both papers) will equate to any particular grade. Ofqual has said that a comparable outcomes approach will be used in the summer 2017 award. Approximately the same proportion of students who get a C or better in summer 2016 will get a grade 4 or better in summer 2017. Marks will be awarded according to the skills descriptors in the bands of the mark scheme.

With so many changes to the subject content and structure, it is impossible to predict student performance for the overall qualification prior to first award in 2017. There are no approximate grade conversions for each separate question.

Defining grades

Until we have completed marking and awarding process at the end of summer 2017, we will not be able to say where the grade boundaries are for the new specification. This is the case for all exam boards. Once we have completed the first award, you will be able to see the boundaries that have been established for the series and that suite of papers.

Different routes to a grade

There will be a number of different routes to any particular grade – based upon performance across several questions and separate papers. We see a variance in students' performance across the different skills being assessed. Therefore, there is no standard expectation that achieving mark band 4 in a question may lead to a certain level overall. The examiners mark the papers, using the mark scheme consistently and create a rank order for the students.

Progress 8 and double counting

For the forthcoming Progress 8 measure, for double counting to apply, a student needs to be entered for both GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature. You do not need to do both with the same board, but ours, for example, are designed to be co-taught.

Future exam papers

Future exam papers will be very closely based on the sample assessment materials. However, we always seek to improve questions from series to series if it becomes apparent that particular wording is not eliciting the full range of responses.