

EXAMINERS' REPORT

AM ENGLISH

FIRST SESSION 2018



L-Università
ta' Malta

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EXAMINERS' REPORT: AM ENGLISH (FIRST SESSION 2018)

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Performance

	Grade	No. of Candidates	% of Candidates	
	A	16	2.1	
	B	46	6.1	
	C	266	35.5	
	D	114	15.2	
	E	125	16.7	
	F	141	18.8	
	Absent	41	5.5	
	Total	749	100.0	
	Grade	No. of Candidates	% of Candidates	
	A - C	328	43.8	
	A - E	567	75.7	
	FAIL	141	18.8	

We begin this report with an evaluation of the candidates' general performance in the 2018 May session. The first observation is that the percentage of candidates who obtained a grade between A and C (43.8%) is marginally better (+1.5%) than in 2017 (42.3%). The same marginal improvement is seen in the percentage of candidates who obtained a grade between A and E (75.8% in 2018, 74% in 2017, i.e. +1.8%).

However, we also register a decrease in the percentage of students who were awarded an A (-0.3%, down from 2.4% to 2.1%), B (-2.5%, down from 8.6% to 6.1%), or D (-2.1%, down from 17.3% to 15.2%), and an increase in candidates being awarded a C (+4.3%, up from 31.2% to 35.5%) or an E (+2.4%, up from 14.4% to 16.8%).

These results reflect a generally average performance in this year's May session, with fewer candidates than last year excelling or doing very well (less As and Bs). Nonetheless, we urge caution against simplistic interpretations of these results in terms of a general lowering of standards at a national level because while excellence was generally rarer, performances which were deemed worthy of a C or above actually increased as a percentage, and the percentage of candidates passing the exam (A to E) was higher than last year. Therefore, these results offer an interesting mixture of positive and negative indicators.

A closer look at the candidates' performance in the different components of the exam (Oral, Paper 1, Paper 2, and Paper 3) can help us explain these results further. We note, first of all, a

very significant improvement in the candidates' overall performance in Paper 3 (Language essay; Summary; Linguistics) and a significant improvement in the Orals. As it will be seen below, most of the improvement in Paper 3 may be attributed to very good results in the Linguistics component, especially by those who chose Question 3, but candidates obtained relatively good scores in the Language Essay and the Summary too. This confirms Paper 3 as the paper in which candidates have tended, over the last few years, to do best overall.

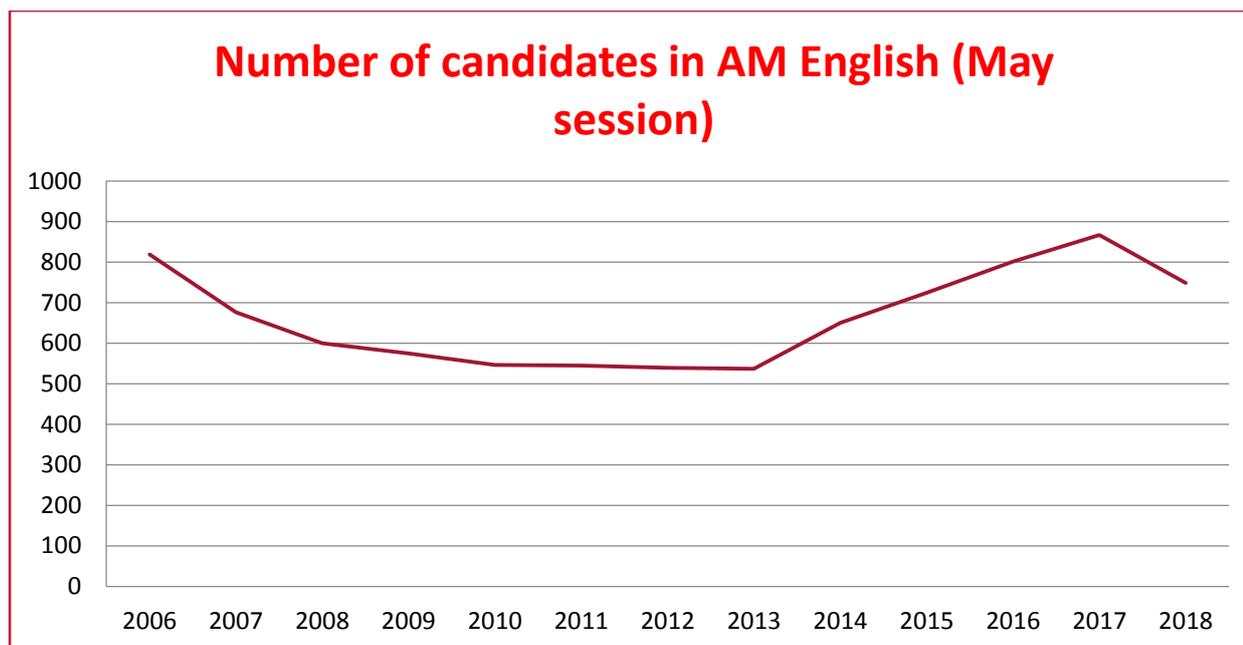
However, the candidates' performance in Paper 1 (Shakespeare; Set Poetry; Poetry Criticism) and Paper 2 (Novels; Prose Criticism) was markedly weaker than last year's. Paper 2, in particular, proved to be very challenging for most candidates, and this confirms a trend that has been noticeable in the last few years in terms of generally average to poor performances in Paper 2. However, what was unexpected this year was that, beyond Prose Criticism (the component in the exam in which candidates tend to perform most poorly), performance was generally weak in the rest of Paper 2 (Set Novels) with many essays not answering the rubric set or simply repackaging rehearsed material, irrespective of its relevance to the question chosen.

Scores in the Set Poetry and Poetry Criticism sections in Paper 1 were also lower than last year, though differences were less marked than in the other two papers, and candidates did marginally better in Shakespeare than last year.

In summary, this year, candidates did better in the Language Paper and the Oral, but not as well in the Literature Papers (1 and 2). We return to this topic in the part of the report dealing with the individual components as well as in the Conclusion to this report, in which we also provide suggestions for educators and candidates on how to prepare better for the Advanced English exam.

1.2 Number of Candidates and Absentees

The 2017 Advanced English exam had the highest ever number of candidates sitting for Advanced English in one sitting (867). This year, there were 749 candidates registered for the exam. While this represents a significant drop (118 less than 2017), the numbers should be assessed in the context of the numbers of previous years, in comparison to which this year's numbers were still high (4th highest total in the last thirteen years). It is also worth comparing these numbers with those of candidates opting for other languages in the MATSEC exams, which will show that Languages were, overall, chosen less than in the previous year (see MATSEC statistical report).



Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Candidates	819	676	600	575	546	545	539	537	650	724	801	867	749

The number of candidates is also worth analysing in relation to absentees (5.5% in 2018).

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
% Absent	7.0	8.1	11.2	8.9	9.1	6.2	6.7	5.4	7.1	4.6	5.1	5.4	5.5

In the 2017 Examiners' report, we provided a detailed explanation of how absentees are calculated in the exam, and the ways in which the candidates' results are affected by missing specific components in the exam. This has been a particularly pertinent issue since 2013, when the oral component was added to the written components in Advanced English. You may refer to the 2017 report for details, but, in summary, the main points are that:

- the official number of absent candidates (41 candidates in 2018, i.e. 5.5%) is calculated on the basis of candidates who miss *all* the components of the exam, including the oral and the three written papers; and
- this number does not include candidates who attend one or two components (written or oral) and then miss all or some of the rest.

In the May 2018 sitting, 31 candidates (4.1%) missed one or more but not all parts of the exam, in the following ways:

- 2 missed the oral but sat for the written papers
- 25 only attended the oral exam but missed all the written components
- 3 attended the oral exam and Paper 1 but were absent for Paper 2 and Paper 3
- 1 attended only Paper 1

A student who misses the oral exam loses up to 6.1% of the global mark, while Paper 1 and 2 carry 33.3% of the marks each, and Paper 3 carries 27.3% of the global mark. All of the candidates who missed a part of the exam failed the exam this year.

A final observation on absent candidates is that the number of candidates who missed all the components (officially, absent) together with those who missed one or more parts of the exam

and were awarded an F was 80 (10.7%), which is significant, but also marks an improvement from 2017, when 121 candidates (12.1%) were absent for one or more parts of the exam.

This means that while the number of registered candidates this year was significantly lower than last year's (118 fewer candidates), the difference between 2018 and 2017 in terms of the number of candidates who actually sat for the whole exam is smaller (746 in 2017; 669 in 2018, i.e., 77 less).

1.3 Use of English

As in previous years, we would like to refer to the relevant parts of the syllabus that indicate the standards expected in this exam in terms of use of English:

Aims

A course based on this Syllabus should enable the following to be achieved:

- *competence in handling the English language accurately, with minimal errors in grammar and spelling;*
- *the ability to communicate ideas effectively and through coherent logic and structure in expression and argumentation;*
- *a knowledge of various aspects and variations of English style, and the ability to apply this knowledge to good effect and ideally with some evidence of stylishness and flair in one's own writing; [...]*

Assessment Objectives

The examination will assess a candidate's ability to:

- *write lucidly, fluently and accurately on a number of subjects;*
- *use appropriate vocabulary and style; [...]*
- *communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary studies [...] (AM English Syllabus, p.2)*

Appendix 1: Notes to Students and Teachers

Quality of Language in Student Answers

*It cannot be sufficiently emphasised that candidates will be assessed on their ability to organise and present information, ideas, descriptions and arguments clearly and logically, taking into account accuracy in their use of grammar, punctuation and spelling. In all questions across all papers, marks awarded will take into account the quality of the language used by the candidate.
(AM English Syllabus, p.7)*

As clearly stated in the syllabus, accuracy and clarity in the use of English are fundamental requirements at this level, and candidates will find it difficult to pass the exam if they are weak in these aspects. To attain high grades, high levels of accuracy as well as elements of 'stylishness and flair' are required. This includes the ability to use: a wide range of sentence structures; fluent, idiomatic English; and specific and appropriate vocabulary. Candidates also need to show they can present their arguments clearly, logically, and coherently by strategically moving from point to point using appropriate linking devices and in a way that is clearly planned and not random or improvised during the actual writing of the essay.

It should be made clear that students who did well in the exam did show that, by and large, they have attained the required standards in their use of English. Indeed, 328 students were awarded a grade between A and C, and this number should not be underestimated when discussing national standards.

However, there is ample room for improvement in this respect, and most of the markers commented on the recurrent weaknesses and language errors that blight a high number of essays. Many of these comments are synthesised and presented in the next section of this Introduction for ease of reference, though in some cases, where appropriate, they are presented in the feedback on the specific components further down in the report.

1.3.1 Weaknesses in use of English

- i. **Style and register:**
Many candidates use very colloquial and informal language when this is inappropriate in most components of the exam.
- ii. **Grammar:**
Poor grammatical structures and clumsiness of expression often with direct transliteration from Maltese as well as sentences that do not make much sense are common.

For example, 'she could not stay with her mouth closed', 'he made a suicide'.
- iii. **Tenses:**
There is a tendency amongst a high number of candidates to use both the present and the past, or the past and the past perfect in their essays indiscriminately or to use the past tense throughout. For example, 'The duke allows Othello to speak even though he had just told Brabantio that he will...'
- iv. **Spelling:**
'Shakespear', 'Desdimona', 'lead' instead of 'led', 'differance', 'independant', 'obidiant', 'begining', 'lenghts', 'committ adultary', 'women' instead of 'woman', 'hankerchief', 'throught' instead of 'throughout', 'faith' instead of 'fate', 'Venician', etc.
- v. **Punctuation:**
Punctuation is generally a very weak point. For example, there were many cases of long sentences in which commas were inserted where linking words or full stops should have been used (comma splice).
- vi. **Subject and verb disagreement:**
'Iago tell Roderigo to...'
- vii. **Use of which instead of who:**
'They have their own wives which are Emilia and Desdemona'.
- viii. **Prepositions:**
'accused' followed by 'for' and not by 'of'; 'in the beginning of the play' rather than 'at the beginning'.
- ix. **Pronouns:**
'Cassio, an old friend of Desdemona, he used to...'; 'He used to compliment Desdemona which it bothered the likes of Iago...'

Paper 1**Candidates' Choice of Questions in Paper 1**

Play	Section A	Number of Essays	Poet	Section B	Number of Essays
Julius Caesar	1a	1	Emily Dickinson	1a	0
	1b	1		1b	0
	1c	0	John Keats	2a	0
The Tempest	2a	0	Wilfred Owen	2b	0
	2b	0		3a	529
	2c	0	3b	153	
Othello	3a	113			
	3b	318			
	3c	248			

Section A: Shakespeare**Julius Caesar**

1a. (attempted by 1 candidate) (Gobbet)

*Cassius I know where I will wear this dagger then:
[...]And dangers are to me indifferent.*

Only 1 candidate attempted the gobbet. No comments on the candidates' performance may be given. Any attempt to comment will jeopardise the candidates' privacy.

1c. (attempted by 1 candidate)

'Tragedy in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar is in many ways a consequence of the characters' misreading of the world around them.' Discuss.

Only one candidate attempted the general essay. No comments on the candidates' performance may be given. Any attempt to comment will jeopardise the candidates' privacy.

The Tempest

Questions on *The Tempest* were not attempted by any candidate.

Othello

3a. (attempted by 113 candidates) (Gobbet)

*Othello Her father loved me, oft invited me, [...]
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs.*

Unlike previous years, candidates did relatively well in the Shakespeare gobbet, with the majority properly contextualising the passage, probably owing to the fact that it occurs quite early on in the text and is easily distinguishable. However, as in previous sittings, when marks were lost they were lost for the following reasons:

- i. whilst the rubric specifically states that candidates should focus on at least two elements from a list of four (characterisation, imagery, theme, setting), a good number chose to focus on one element only, in many instances, simply character. There were some candidates who discussed Othello's and Desdemona's characters quite well, focusing on the extract itself, yet a good number moved away from the extract to discuss their characters as they appear in the rest of the play and said very little about what is revealed about them in the given passage;
- ii. candidates provided an extended paraphrase of the given extract;
- iii. candidates narrated the plot of the play rather than focusing on the extract itself and its significance in relation to the play as a whole.

3b. (attempted by 318 candidates)

Compare and contrast Desdemona and Emilia. Focus on their relationships with and attitudes toward their husbands and other male characters in Othello.

The majority of the candidates who attempted this question wrote at length about both characters separately and only attempted to compare and contrast in their discussion of the second character. Unfortunately, many essays simply dealt with the change in both characters as the play progresses and very little else. A significant number of candidates provided material which was irrelevant to the question set, while others discussed the women's treatment at the hands of Iago and Othello without actually focusing on their characters. Emilia's and Desdemona's relationships with other men were discussed, yet very often with no attempt being made to compare or contrast.

3c. (attempted by 248 candidates)

Discuss the themes of passion and self-control in Othello.

Many of the candidates who chose this question tackled the two themes separately. The following are some observations on the candidates' approach to this question:

- i. Many discussed Othello's and Desdemona's passion at the start of the play and how Othello's passion transforms into revenge by the end of the play.
- ii. Passion as it applies to Iago was mentioned only by a few candidates.
- iii. Othello's loss of self-control was tackled by the majority, even though a number of essays lacked close reference to the text.
- iv. Othello's self-control at the start of the play was overlooked by a good number of candidates.
- v. A number of candidates linked passion and self-control, and demonstrated how passion led to the loss of self-control especially in Othello's case. There were also a few who commented on passion and self-control as they apply to Iago.

General comments

- i. As happened in previous sittings, many marks were lost in this section specifically on account of poor language skills, even in essays where content was on the whole satisfactory. Some of the aspects of language that were problematic in this section are discussed in Section 1.3 above.
- ii. Although a number of candidates provided appropriate introductions and conclusions, the majority do not seem to know what is required of them in an introduction and/or conclusion. They do not appear to be aware of the importance of a thesis statement, and, as a result, the introductions and/or conclusions have often absolutely nothing to do with the question asked.
- iii. Previous reports emphasised the need for arguments to be substantiated by evidence from the text. There were many cases where this was lacking. Direct quotation is also necessary (inexistent in a good number of essays). When quoting, candidates need to ensure that what they present as a quote is indeed a quote as there were some cases where the quotes presented were inaccurate and, hence, not quotes at all.

- iv. It was evident that many candidates did not plan their essays. This is reflected in the haphazard way in which candidates moved from one idea to the other in the course of their essays and then came back to the same idea later on in their essays, thus repeating themselves. Others merely rambled on, and their task lacked coherence as a consequence.
- v. Many candidates tended to simply paraphrase the plot rather than deal with relevant points.
- vi. Unfortunately, there were many candidates, even among those who wrote good essays, who expressed ideas which were not relevant to the question asked. Students need to be trained to select material that is relevant to the question. A number wrote almost completely irrelevant essays, probably in an attempt to reproduce rehearsed material.
- vii. Previous reports mentioned the fact that the *Appendix* in the syllabus states that the title of a play should be underlined, yet once again the vast majority of candidates overlooked this and placed the title within inverted commas or else underlined it *and* used inverted commas. Once again, there were a good number of candidates who referred to *Othello* as a novel.

Section B - Set Poetry

All candidates chose to answer one of the two questions related to Owen's poetry. None of the candidates chose any of the questions on John Keats or Emily Dickinson.

3a. (attempted by 529 candidates)

With reference to THREE or more poems, discuss the contrasts between the ways Owen portrays soldiers going to war and returning from war.

- i. The poems chosen most often for discussion in this question were 'The Send Off', 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', and 'Disabled'.
- ii. Most introductions and conclusions were generic, in that they could be used for any essay and were not very well written and developed. In fact, some of them were very remotely relevant to the essay's title, and were weakly constructed around the typical phrase that 'Owen's poetry lies in the pity'.
- iii. The majority of candidates did not attempt any to relate the poems discussed to each other. In fact, those who did better structured their essays around a series of comparisons and contrasts that could be found in the poems, for example, the similar sombre endings of 'The Send Off' and 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', the disillusion evident in the soldiers in 'Disabled', 'The Dead Beat' and 'SIW', and others.
- iv. Paragraphing is still a problem with a handful of students who insist on structuring their essay through a series of very short paragraphs that lacked cohesion. Some essays mainly consisted of paraphrasing of poems with some interspersed quotes. The trend was to summarise poems separately in a body of three paragraphs. No attempt or minimal attempt at cohesion or at linking the paragraphs was made.
- v. A number of candidates disregarded the essay's title and wrote all they knew about the poems without any attempt at tailoring the information for the particular rubric.
- vi. Some candidates passed general comments about the 'messages' delivered through Owen's poetry without going into any detail about specific poems or at least illustrating these points with direct reference to the texts.
- vii. A few managed to misspell or distort the poems' titles.

3b. (attempted by 153 candidates)

'Owen's poetic language is heavily dependent on the evocation of the senses.' Discuss with reference to *THREE* or more poems of your choice.

- i. Most candidates referred to 'The Sentry', 'Anthem for Doomed Youth', 'Exposure', 'Dulce et Decorum Est' and 'Futility' in response to this question.
- ii. Some of the essays in response to this question seemed to suggest that candidates did not understand the phrase 'evocation of the senses'. Some candidates used phrases like 'evoke a sense of pity'; 'this gives a sense of sadness'; 'this creates a sense of death'. Rather than focusing on how Owen uses language to appeal to the different senses or depict the lack of them in soldiers returning from the battlefield, candidates often understood the word 'senses' to mean 'a feeling of' or an 'understanding', even if the phrase 'evocation of the senses' is often used in the language of poetry criticism at this level to refer to how poets may use language that appeals to the readers' senses, such as sight, hearing, taste, touch, and taste.
- iii. A good number of candidates were able to write adequate essays that referred to different poetic techniques, like onomatopoeia, alliteration, various forms of imagery, and to the depiction of the loss of the soldier's senses in Owen's poetry, such as, the loss of touch because of severed limbs; blindness because of shellshock, and other examples.
- iv. Yet again, some candidates tended to disregard the essay question and simply focused on limited summaries of the poems. Rather than focusing on the use of poetic language, they simply narrated what happened in the poem. Some of the information was obviously relevant but not adequately utilised and developed.
- v. Many candidates were unable to explain their points clearly or at least use quotes to illustrate what they actually meant.

Section C – Poetry Criticism

- i. The poem chosen as unseen text for the May session was 'Note to a Sister' by Keith Wilson.
- ii. This poem is short and clearly defined in terms of structure.
- iii. With regard to theme, 'Note to a Sister' is relatively clear. It speaks about a fraught relationship between siblings, one that has left a lingering mark on the mind and heart of the speaker. This is something that the poetic voice cannot reconcile with, and through his poetic art the speaker is trying to make amends for whatever could have happened in childhood, a disturbing event or events that have left him mentally and emotionally in anguish. There is a sense that this childhood innocence has been corrupted by events; there is also an intimation of doom because it appears that the speaker's sister is now beyond reach and the much-desired reconciliation is all but completely jeopardised.
- iv. Although the poem is sprinkled with significant metaphors, such as 'heavy with mossed memories', 'parallel showers of stars', these symbolical references help the reader to understand the text better rather than obscure the inferences being made. In fact, the entire poem is not dense with too many metaphors and symbols that would have required students to engage with the text on a deeper level. Despite this, the vast majority of students tended to over-read, with the consequence that there were quite a few (over 42%) who veered into the fantastical and recreated whole stories which were either extremely tangential or else completely off-point. Although two answers made

unconvincing references to violent sexual abuse, almost all the others were more neutral and preferred to dwell on a broken relationship and/or severed ties between siblings.

- v. Almost 93% of the students were unable to discuss aspects of form, structure, style, and tone at the required level. Sometimes, even the most perceptive answers failed to make the distinction between stanza and paragraph, line and verse. Unequivocally, all students also confuse the notion of dynamics with speed. While speed relates to the pace at which the line moves, dynamics relates to emotional states. Tone can be soft, but it can never be slow.
- vi. Many essays reproduced similar introductions, which were obviously learned by heart. These introductions tend to weaken rather than strengthen the essays they are used in as they sound formulaic and have little to no specific relevance to the given poem. Introductions (like the other parts of the essays) should be written in response to the text given rather than regurgitated from memory.
- vii. The best essays were cogent and coherent in terms of language use, paragraphing, punctuation, and argument. The style was poised and the register was largely well-pitched. There were a handful of brilliant essays; these had poise and critical rigour. The average essay maintained a balance between the stolid and the largely mediocre – most of these were descriptive and/or narrative 'accounts'. The very weak essays lacked structure, argument, critical engagement and, worse still, were marred by very erratic language use.

Paper 2

Statistical Data showing Candidates' Choice of Questions in Paper 2

Novel	Section A Question	Number of essays	% (rounded up to 1 decimal point)
<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	1a	194	14.3%
	1b	369	27.2%
<i>Emma</i>	2a	5	0.4%
	2b	39	2.9%
<i>Great Expectations</i>	3a	39	2.9%
	3b	37	2.7%
<i>The Heart of the Matter</i>	4a	30	2.2%
	4b	237	17.5%
<i>Atonement</i>	5a	63	4.6%
	5b	342	2.5%
<i>A Handful of Dust</i>	6a	0	0%
	6b	0	0%

Novels listed in Descending Order of Popularity among Candidates	Number of Candidates Writing about this Novel
<i>The Handmaid's Tale</i>	563
<i>Atonement</i>	405
<i>The Heart of the Matter</i>	267
<i>Great Expectations</i>	77
<i>Emma</i>	44
<i>A Handful of Dust</i>	0

Section A: Set Novels

General Comments

- i. In this session, there were less essays than last year falling under the Excellent/Very Good brackets or the Weak bracket than last year. The majority of the essays fell either under the Good or the Adequate categories.
- ii. On the whole, the greatest weakness was the inability to write an essay that was focused on the rubric of the gobbet or the essay question. Organisation and cohesion were also lacking.
- iii. Apart from the average to below average use of language, informal register seems to dominate, including colloquialism, and this is not desirable at advanced level. A more formal register that demonstrates an ability to handle a certain degree of academic acumen is sought out in this context.

The Handmaid's Tale, by Margaret Atwood

1a (attempted by 194 candidates) (Gobbet)

*We go past the shops and come to the barrier again, and are passed through. [...]
'There is a Bomb in Gilead,' was what Moira used to call it.*

Unlike in previous Advanced English examinations, this gobbet was taken from two different parts of the novel (Chapter 8 and Chapter 34). We refer to the relevant part of the syllabus:

"In the case of passage-based questions, candidates will be expected to place the extract within its context and discuss its significance to the narrative. They may be asked to explore the thematic implications of the extract, highlighting pertinent links with the rest of the novel while possibly being required also to comment on imagery, characterisation, setting and time. Candidates are reminded that answers to the gobbet question should be firmly anchored in analysis of the extract and consequently they should refrain from regarding this question as a prompt to say all they know about the novel. Thus, while encouraged to make connections with other parts of the text, these must be fully relevant to the extract in question." (AM Syllabus (2018) English), p.4)

This is the rubric for novel gobbets in the exam:

In the gobbet question you are expected to ground your response in the given text. You should [1] identify the text's immediate context and [2] relate the text to TWO OR MORE of the following [3] while making reference to the novel as a whole: characterisation, imagery, theme, setting.

While there is no explicit statement in the syllabus that the gobbet has to be chosen from one context, it was agreed by the markers that since the rubric refers to 'the text's immediate context' rather than 'contexts', special provisions had to be made by markers in assessing essays on this gobbet in this sitting. The following is the rationale adopted in this situation:

Students answering this question are usually expected to discuss three main elements, as shown in the rubric above:

[1] identify the text's immediate context and

[2] relate the text to TWO OR MORE of the following

[3] while making reference to the novel as a whole: characterisation, imagery, theme, setting

Having an extract taken from two different parts of the book means that students may find it difficult to identify the text's immediate context correctly because there are actually two contexts involved. However, they should still be able to address the second and third aspects of the rubric without any problems as there are a variety of aspects of theme, character, imagery and setting that can be discussed in the passage given, and then in relation to the novel as a whole.

For this reason, markers chose to *ignore* any references to the *context* in the candidates' responses in this question (1a) and focused instead on the candidates' tackling of the other two

main points in the rubric. Candidates' responses to gobbet questions over the last five years indicate that the candidates' discussion of the immediate context in gobbet questions usually amounts to between 1 and 5 lines of text, so the part of the candidates' responses that had to be ignored in terms of its relevance to contextualisation in this case was minimal.

Nonetheless, we would like to point out two other facts that explain the procedures adopted in this case:

- i. There are no specific marks that are devoted to the identification of the text's immediate context in the gobbets. The validity of the candidates' reference to context is one of the many criteria (more than 15) employed in the marking of gobbet essays. This particular component of the exam is graded through holistic rather than analytical marking, so not applying one criterion in this instance did not mean that any marks were lost or that they had to be redistributed to the fulfilment of other criteria in the candidates' responses but that the remaining criteria were used instead in the marking of each essay.
- ii. In order not to be unfair to candidates who, despite the extract being taken from two contexts, still managed to discuss contextualisation effectively (there were a number of candidates who commented on the fact that the extract was indeed taken from two different parts of the novel), we adopted the following procedure:
 - a. Candidates were not penalized if the context was not mentioned or mentioned incorrectly.
 - b. If one or two of the contexts were identified correctly (and this applies to the vast majority of the essays marked), candidates were rewarded for showing familiarity with the text under another criterion used in our marking, that is, Knowledge of the Text.
 - c. Candidates who did not mention the context/s or did so erroneously were given the benefit of the doubt, while students who referred to it correctly were rewarded.

As a final note on the matter, students who did not refer to the context or did so erroneously could still show familiarity with the text in the rest of the essay, so we firmly believe that no student was affected negatively by the gobbet having been taken from two different places in the novel. Nonetheless, we strongly suggest that future gobbets in this and other parts of the exam should continue being chosen from a single context unless the syllabus is changed to specify otherwise.

Other comments on the candidates' performance in this question:

- i. Good essays in this section focused on some or all of the following:
 - a. the motif of the double, the loss of identity; the theme of individuality; and Offred's desire to distance herself from her situation as shown in the first part of the gobbet;
 - b. Offred's ability to resist mentally by playing with language; cynicism and humour as forms of resistance in particular situations as shown in the second part of the gobbet.
- ii. The weaker essays tended to simply speak about the situation of Handmaids in Gilead in a very general manner or simply paraphrase the gobbet.
- iii. As in other years and in other parts of this year's exam, a good number of candidates did not follow the rubric and did not fulfil the task in a satisfactory manner as they did not focus enough on the given passage and its relation to the novel as a whole but simply used the passage as a springboard for more general essays that come across as rehearsed and only tangentially relevant.

1b) (attempted by 369 candidates)

'Indoctrination is a very important part of control in The Handmaid's Tale'. Discuss.

- i. It is clear that some candidates did not know the meaning of 'indoctrination', even though this is a central theme in Atwood's novel. A few seemed to believe that 'indoctrination' had something to do with doctors and focused on Offred's visit to the doctor. Others simply associated 'indoctrination' with 'doctrine' and focused exclusively on religion rather than on indoctrination as a form of brainwashing and persuasion meant for people to accept beliefs and situations uncritically or with little resistance.
- ii. A good number of essays listed the different types of *control* in Gilead with little or no focus on indoctrination. While control is related to indoctrination in that indoctrination is one means of control used in Gilead, the two terms are different and their scope in the novel is different.
- iii. The best essays spoke about the re-education of the handmaids at the Red Centre, including Janine's testifying; about Offred's fear of not getting pregnant as her expectations have become the expectations of others in spite of herself, also seen in her reaction to the Japanese tourists; and the reference to the walls of the Red Centre being perceived as safe. Other aspects of indoctrination and control were also mentioned, namely the use of biblical precedent and the use of fear tactics.
- iv. Few candidates referred to the way indoctrination affects other characters in the novel, such as the Commander and his Wife, and the way indoctrination is wielded hypocritically by Gilead in different contexts.

Emma, by Jane Austen

2a. (attempted by 5 candidates) (Gobbet)

'They remained but a few minutes together, as Miss Woodhouse must not be kept waiting; and Harriet then came running to her with a smiling face, and in a flutter of spirits, which Miss Woodhouse hoped very soon to compose.' [...]

- i. There was a marked absence of critical engagement in all of *Emma's* essays, and performance in this question was rather weak.
- ii. Although identification of the immediate context of the extract was not particularly problematic, candidates tended to depart from the extract immediately without grounding their question in it, as requested by the rubric.
- iii. The extract is quite significant as it marks the encounter with Mr Martin and Emma's influence on Harriet. However, candidates did not dwell on the latter key feature vis-a-vis Emma's newly discovered ambition for match making.
- iv. Generally, candidates resorted to a narration of Emma's unsuccessful endeavour to find a suitable husband for Harriet. Therefore, similar to past performance in the gobbet, many candidates resorted to narration rather than providing a discussion of how the given text related to the novel as a whole.

2 b. (attempted by 39 candidates)

'You have been no friend to Harriet Smith, Emma.' Discuss Emma's relationship with Harriet in the light of Mr Knightley's comment.

- i. This was the most popular question, and responses tended not to address the key focus in the rubric and only treated the relationship superficially.
- ii. There was a marked absence of critical engagement in all of the essays responding to this question. With the exception of the very few, essays treated the question quite superficially and they frequently led to a narration of events surrounding the two characters.
- iii. Often, candidates resorted to discussing the theme of social class or misunderstandings and ignored the relationship between the two characters.

- iv. The essay question demanded a focus on the conflicting views held by Mr Knightley and Emma with regard to Harriet Smith, as well as Emma's obsession with helping Harriet. Most candidates failed to focus on Emma's inability to reflect on her actions but also on how Mr Knightley saw through her actions and behaviour. Emma's notion of friendship with Harriet conflicts with that of Mr Knightley's.
- v. As in previous years, there was hardly any attempt to reflect on the keywords in the essay question.

Great Expectations, by Charles Dickens

3 a. (attempted by 39 candidates) (Gobbet)

'Now, I return to this young fellow. And the communication I have got to make is, that he has great expectations. [...]

- i. This question was only slightly more popular than 3b. Candidates succeeded in identifying the context of the gobbet; however, they were not always able to ground their responses in the given text. In fact, the overall performance in this question was slightly weaker than in the other (3b). This does not reflect the performance of last year's gobbet responses in *Great Expectations*, which tended to be better than this year's.
- ii. The quality of the essays ranged from insightful and well-critiqued responses that managed to strike a balance between the given text and the rest of the novel to a complete departure from the passage.
- iii. In the stronger essays, candidates demonstrated the ability to blend the focus on character, theme and imagery, especially when they focussed on Mr Jaggers, without compromising any of the features.
- iv. As noted in previous years, knowledge of the text never seems to present a problem in responses to *Great Expectations*; this year, it was the failure to ground the essay in the extract and the almost exclusive focus on Pip's development as a true gentleman which compromised a good number of responses.
- v. Essays which departed from the passage and never revisited it were focussed on Pip's character and the themes of social class and personal development. Although these points were clearly relevant, they became the sole focus of the essays, and the candidates often failed to create links between the passage and the novel as a whole.

3 b (attempted by 37 candidates)

Discuss Dickens's treatment of abuse and wrongdoing in Great Expectations.

- i. Some of the better essays in Paper 2 were found in the responses to this question.
- ii. The essays ranged from complex and articulate discussions on how Dickens presented his social criticism of Victorian society to simplistic conclusions drawn from examples of wrongdoings.
- iii. Corruption of justice, retribution and redemption were some of the themes explored in the better essays; whereas, essays which simply provided a list of examples that did not serve to sustain an argument that supports or challenges the statement were considered to be inferior in quality.
- iv. Candidates who were able to present a well-supported discussion showed a degree of maturity that is welcomed at this level.
- v. The essay topic was approached well by a good number of candidates even when the quality of the writing was not at the desired level.

The Heart of the Matter, by Graham Greene

4a (attempted by 30 candidates) (Gobbet)

'I don't know how to put it, Father, but I feel – tired of my religion [...] Looking up at the Cross he thought, He even suffers in public.

- i. In general, the candidates' overall performance in this gobbet was average to mediocre with some of the candidates finding it hard to contextualise the excerpt. Moreover, those who came close to identifying the context were not always able to comment on its significance in relation to the rest of the novel.
- ii. This year's extract dealt with how Scobie has reached breaking point, but, as he is not the kind of man to accept compromise, he cannot bear Fr Rank's attitude which would give six months' leave as penance for many of the confessions he hears. The passage was taken from Book Three, Part One, Chapter 2. The examination rubric does not require candidates to state this, but a good number of the 30 candidates who answered the gobbet question attempted to connect the text to a particular Book, Part and/or chapter number and almost invariably got it wrong (a few of them said that the text 'is taken from the first book of the novel' or is 'found in Book two'). The pivotal aspect about this part of the exercise is to identify the significance of the extract's location in the plot. For instance, in the given passage Scobie goes to confession after the scene in which he is blackmailed by Yusef and just before he visits Helen Rolt again.
- iii. While some of the candidates succeeded in presenting a discussion of characterisation and theme as explored in the text, those who mentioned the setting and imagery were not very successful. One of the candidates even went so far as to write that, 'Imagery in this book is another element that can bring down even the strongest man.'
- iv. All else considered, the answers were quite varied and there was a consistent attempt to ground the gobbet in the given text.

4b (attempted by 237 candidates)

'Pity smouldered like decay at his heart.' Discuss the character of Scobie in the light of this quotation.

- i. This was clearly the more popular choice.
- ii. The essay question asked candidates to discuss the character of Scobie in the light of the given quotation: 'Pity smouldered like decay at his heart.' Thus, the question called for an engagement with the above quote together with a full treatment of the characterisation of Scobie. The title required the candidates to refer to Scobie's relation to those for whom he feels responsible, together with a distinction between pity and love.
- iii. Most of the candidates had a sound knowledge of the novel, but there were issues with the level of focus, critical engagement, and depth of analysis, or lack of, offered by the candidates. In fact, there were candidates whose essays attributed too much importance to examples, thus not focusing the discussion on 'pity' as their essay was limited to narration. There were others who did not attempt to create any links between the paragraphs and ideas developed.
- iv. It was indeed saddening to come across responses that showed understanding and knowledge of the text while the content remained for the most part superficial. Moreover, candidates did not always show a good command of the English language. To reiterate what was mentioned in last year's report, a common mistake was the mixing up of the words *borrow*, *lend*, *bribe*, and *loan*. In fact, several candidates wrote phrases like the following: *Scobie lends money from the shady character Yusef; To make his wife happy he went to lend money from the bank; Scobie did not have enough money to do so, therefore he went to bribe from Yusef; Because of the war atmosphere the bank couldn't loan them money.* Another very common mistake was the use of the infinitive form 'to be'. For instance, *Helen is described to be an [...]; The enigmatic protagonist Scobie is seen to be an intrinsically good man.*

Atonement, by Ian McEwan

5a (attempted by 63 candidates) (Gobbet)

One word contained everything he felt, and explained why he was to dwell on this moment later. Freedom. [...] He would take lodgings in a strange town – and begin.

- i. While the total number of candidates who opted for this novel was 405, only 63 candidates chose to answer the gobbet question.
- ii. The extract was taken from the point prior to Robbie's realisation that he had given the wrong 'typed page' to Briony, in order to deliver it to Cecilia. Many candidates discussed Robbie's character development throughout the novel, thereby using the extract to write an essay on Robbie, failing to ground their responses in the given passage. As a result, only a couple of essays remained focused on the gobbet throughout. However, those that did remain focused not only developed a good response to the extract but also succeeded in contextualising it (one candidate went so far as to pinpoint the exact chapter from where the extract was taken, even though this is not expected) and in striking a balance between relating the gobbet to relevant themes and its significance to the whole novel.
- iii. Candidates in the top bracket distinguished themselves by their confidence in handling and expressing complex ideas fluently, their ability to frame their argument within a well-structured essay, and their display of critical acumen.

5b (attempted by 342 candidates)

Discuss McEwan's portrayal of childhood in Atonement.

- i. A good number of the 342 candidates who opted to discuss McEwan's portrayal of childhood in *Atonement* did not score highly because they either ignored the question completely and only indirectly addressed it in the course of the essay, or their essay was simply a superficial narration of all of Part One of the novel. Very often, the narrated events were not directed by carefully selected arguments but were driven by the sequence of events as they occurred.
- ii. Other shortcomings include the following:
 - introductions that bore no relevance to the set question;
 - a very weak grasp of grammar, syntax, and basic punctuation, namely commas;
 - overlong pieces of writing often with disastrous effect on the logical organisation of the essay;
 - the use of both the present and the past tense indiscriminately;
 - the use of informal language;
 - lack of distinction between *Atonement* as title of novel and atonement as a theme within the novel;
- iii. A typical answer demonstrating several of the above weaknesses is the following: 'McEwan portrays childhood in atonement thanks to a character he created himself, "Briony". When Briony sees her sister near the fountain, she stayed looking for what is going on between her and Robbie. She interpret it in a way that Robbie raised his hand and told her sister Cecilia to undress and swim in the fountain. Apart from this, their was also the curiousness of the letter. Another misunderstanding scene was the library scene where she caught her sister and Robbie having an affair. The last misinterpreted situation was the scene where Lola got raped by P. Marshall but for the children "believing is seeing" and that how it was for Briony.'
- iv. The very few outstanding essays consisted of mature writing built on insightful and sophisticated arguments.

Section B – Prose Criticism

For Arthur there was a normal distance between home and church; but each place was filled with presences, with stories and instructions. [...] Knights and their ladies then moved about the tiny kitchen; challenges were issued, quests miraculously fulfilled; armour clanked, chain mail rustled, and honour was always upheld.

- i. The extract was taken from Julian Barnes's *Arthur & George* (2007).
- ii. This year's performance in critical analysis of an unseen prose passage ranged primarily from the mediocre to average, with a number of very weak responses and only a handful that succeeded in placing themselves within the upper bands.
- iii. Immediately noticeable was the inability of several candidates to transition from poetry to prose; it is as though critical analysis belongs to the domain of poetry, with many candidates running into difficulties when confronted with a prose passage. This was evidenced by the references to 'stanzas' instead of 'paragraphs', and 'poem' instead of 'passage'. Candidates also tried to identify specific devices that are clearly the domain of poetry, such as rhyme scheme. 'This passage has no rhyme scheme' is a typical instance.
- iv. Most candidates managed to understand some basic aspects of the passage, that is, that Arthur prefers his mother's story-telling to what he hears in church. The contrast between the two settings of church and kitchen was mentioned by the majority of candidates, who also generally commented well on the bond between mother and son. Unfortunately, most candidates did not take this initial reading any further. The subtle dynamics of the first paragraph proved elusive even for many candidates who wrote quite sensitively about the experience at home. Very few picked up the subtext which was crucial to a solid understanding of the contrast that was set up with the remainder of the passage, that both the church's teachings and the fairy-tales are 'truths' to Arthur. The extract is quite simply about a young child whose imagination is captured by his mother's story-telling rather than what he hears in church. Several understood the meaning of the final paragraph, where imagination takes hold of Arthur so completely that the characters in the fairy-tales gain a solidity within his reality. What few commented on was the way in which Arthur thinks about the 'truths' and 'stories' he hears in church.
- v. Arthur's preference for fairy-tales over the teachings in church gave rise to excessive moralising, leading quite a large number of candidates to get completely carried away, forgetful of the fact that such an exercise in critical analysis is no place to express one's opinion or speculate about religion, the church and the importance of fairy-tales in a child's life. This also meant that several missed the central idea of the passage because they focused instead on the moral lesson, which they naively perceived was the point of the passage. Presumably they were led astray by the line that the mother's stories '*were also designed to teach him the distinction between right and wrong*'. According to a large number of candidates, the author attacks the church's brainwashing of children; Arthur is a mature Catholic who is capable of understanding religious truth; the author shows Arthur's 'ways of learning'; Arthur's mother relates the stories to teach him good values, to get him to like religion in a fun way; the author shows the 'importance of a healthy upbringing' since nowadays children are obsessed with technology, and other such irrelevant ideas. Arthur's mother was repeatedly showered with praise for her extraordinary and innovative methods in educating her son, as though this was the point of the passage. As a consequence, time that could have been better spent analysing the passage was expended writing lengthy paragraphs preaching to the reader but contributing nothing to the argument or analysis.
- vi. Another conclusion that candidates repeatedly jumped to was that Arthur is suffering from some kind of mental disorder or learning difficulty such as ADHD, leading them to

admire Arthur's mother's 'excellent parental skills' which she seems to have put to good use to keep him quiet. Presumably they went into this direction by the line '*Arthur was an energetic, headstrong boy who did not easily sit still*'. A more careful reading would have surely shown these candidates that there is no evidence whatsoever for this in the passage. Moreover, the attempt to fit the text into their pre-conceived notion of the church often limited the interpretation. The impression was that candidates seemed oblivious of the fact that a young child is generally energetic, restless and imaginative. Some also admonished Arthur in no uncertain terms for his lack of enthusiasm in church. All this implied an inability to come to the common-sense conclusion that Arthur behaves like any other young child.

- vii. Discussing the narrative voice was problematic for some candidates. Most mentioned omniscient narration (some saying inexplicably omniscient second-person narration), but had no idea how this functioned in the passage, instead limiting themselves to a standard, presumably rehearsed, definition of omniscience. Those who perceived that Arthur's point of view is focalised through the narrator's omniscience were better positioned to pick up the gap between Arthur's child-like immaturity and the reader's understanding of the dynamics in the passage. The '*normal distance between home and church*' is not necessarily literal as almost everyone assumed; the distance points to the contrast between them upon which the passage rests. A couple of very alert candidates noticed the shifts between total omniscience and Arthur's perception (as in the final paragraph). The stream of consciousness (some wrote 'conscience') technique was also mentioned repeatedly, clearly indicating that those candidates did not understand the term.
- viii. Many candidates wrote well about Arthur's mother and the bond between them, with some engaging sufficiently by suggesting that his mother is described like a character out of one of her fairy-tales, thus lending more credibility and coherence to the idea of imagination depicted as reality. The way she is described and her wielding of the porridge stick give her a witch-like aura; it is as though the kitchen is her stage, where she acts out her stories which come to life at the end, with Arthur as her captive audience. The ritualistic element in the dynamics between mother and son was however lost on most. A few candidates took the stick to mean that she disciplines Arthur by beating him, misreading the tone of final paragraph. Others went further to suggest that she is the villain who keeps Arthur quiet by drugging him, '*slipped a secret herb into his food*', with a couple misreading '*heroine*' as '*heroin*'. Any careful reading of the passage would have immediately put paid to such interpretations as untenable.
- ix. The analysis itself, when this was tackled, left much to be desired. A large percentage of candidates did not attempt any form of analysis, or else merely touched upon a couple of devices, most commonly the phrase '*cold stone church*' to suggest the lack of connection Arthur feels in church contrasted with the warmth of the kitchen. When imagery and/or rhetorical devices were identified, generally these were merely listed, at times explained, but usually without showing their effectiveness in the passage. Thus, a statement such as 'tap the stick against the pan' is an example of onomatopoeia' is what appears to pass as critical analysis for most candidates. Those who tackled the analysis wrote primarily about the emphasis on sounds, although only a handful linked this to the idea of story-telling. Some of the better responses mentioned the concentration of active verbs when describing the mother, contrasted with the monotony and repetition in both diction and structures of the first paragraph. The structure, language and imagery were also focused on, with the better essays commenting on the effectiveness of the stereotypical romantic nature as it lends familiarity and predictability to the stories. The oxymoron '*exquisite torment*' was also highlighted to show the emotions and engagement of Arthur in his mother's narrations. Most also mentioned the wonderful description of the mother's voice, giving the more able candidates the opportunity to shine: the use of both auditory and visual imagery (a few correctly referred to synaesthesia) showing the power Arthur's mother held over him.

- x. There was much evidence of erroneous understanding of literary terms and rhetorical devices. The most glaring and alarming instance was in the simile. An example cited was: *'Everything was very orderly, always listed and numbered, like the hymns and the prayers and the verses of the Bible'*. Evidently candidates eager to identify the usual devices, spotted the word 'like' and concluded that this was a simile, when in fact it is simply introducing an example of the things that are listed and numbered. Other terms that need proper clarification by candidates are register and tone.
- xi. Some candidates transferred their knowledge of linguistics onto critical analysis, with attempts to identify sentence types and structures, and lexical fields. As stated earlier, however, these should not be merely listed but their contribution to the understanding of the passage must be considered.
- xii. There were several stock phrases bandied about, such as 'prose is a transparent form of writing'; 'this is a cohesive-coherent piece of writing'. The issue is not in the inclusion of these statements as such, but in the fact that candidates who use them usually show that they have no idea what they mean.
- xiii. A final comment must be made on the correct use of English and presentation of the response. There were truly few scripts this year that were properly idiomatic and fluent, poised and sophisticated. In the majority of cases, the writing was at best adequate, many times limited and replete with basic errors which rendered meaning unintelligible.
- xiv. There should be much more input on how to structure a response to critical analysis. Most scripts were lacking coherent introductory and concluding paragraphs; topic sentences for different paragraphs; and coherence.

PAPER 3

Language Paper 3 – ESSAY

Section A: Language Essay

Statistical Data for Section A

Essay Question	Number of candidates	% (rounded up to 1 decimal point)
1	15	2.2%
2	117	17.3%
3	57	8.4%
4	264	39%
5	12	1.8%
6	106	15.7%
7	42	6.2%
8	64	9.5%

- i. This year's May paper offered eight options to candidates with a choice of narrative, expository, descriptive, and argumentative essay titles:
 - 1) *Walking on stilts*
 - 2) *A live music concert*
 - 3) *Are selfies an expression of narcissism or a tool for empowerment? Discuss.*
 - 4) *'The best education occurs outside the classroom.'* Discuss.

- 5) *'A digitised economy's ever-changing demands are steadily killing job security.'* Discuss.
- 6) *The fear of following a dream*
- 7) *Independence of thought*
- 8) *Speed*

- ii. The most popular of the titles chosen was Question 4, a discursive question which asked candidates to consider the possibility that education is better when it occurs outside the classroom. This question attracted a number of interesting responses. The majority of candidates who succeeded in obtaining a higher score in this question presented very strong arguments in response to this question, possibly because they may have researched or discussed the topic in detail before. Many essays, whilst varying in skill of execution, followed a pattern of description and or analysis of both sides of the argument, with a rich vocabulary, before applying a subjective conclusion. The best-performing candidates chose sound, objective approaches to arguments based on their experience, and many also offered some evidence from pedagogical, psychological and sociological theorists. These students also wrote fluently and generally without error, demonstrating a strong command of the language and expressing their ideas with a structure that was coherent and cohesive. On the other hand, the middling essays, usually provided loose argumentation that lacked analysis even when the writing was cogent and accurate overall. The essays that were given lower scores were generally badly written, poorly structured and showed evidence that work is needed on sentence structure, punctuation, especially with the use of commas and semi colons/colons, and paragraphing. Many failed to express their ideas coherently, and mistakes in tense choice and the use of unidiomatic expression were quite common. Indeed, much of the work at the lower scale demonstrated language skills well below that which would be considered strong SEC standard. It could be suggested that this title provided the better candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their writing and critical skills well, whilst it also offered those not so critically analytical the chance to gain a decent grade purely on their ability to write coherently and accurately.
- iii. The second most popular title was number 2, 'A live music concert'. Many tackled this as either a discursive essay, or in some cases, as a narrative piece. Again, the better candidates achieved high marks through a rich and varied vocabulary, coupled with varied grammatical structures using appropriate descriptive devices. Their work was fluent and very accurate. The middling efforts were usually very descriptive, formulaic and it could be suggested, rather clichéd in their approach, whilst demonstrating good, varied language skills. The low achieving papers were typically written in ways that showed language skills that are below what is expected at Advanced level.
- iv. Title 3, which asked candidates to consider the 'selfie', produced some very good, analytical work at the upper end of the rating scale, but in the majority of cases, this reasonably popular choice led to candidates revealing their own 'selfie' activities and experiences rather than offering a well-constructed argument over the merits of this very topical appeal for critical thought. Many low-achieving candidates simply did not answer the question set, that is, whether selfies are a tool for empowerment or an expression of narcissism.
- v. 'The fear of following a dream' (Question 6) brought many varied responses, some well-considered, analytical and well-expressed, using complex structures and rich vocabulary. Other candidates missed the opportunity to express their ideas in a coherent and cohesive manner by writing a combination of narrative and discussion that did not work well in many cases. Some of the better essays were more creative than in other titles, and were often characterised by freedom of descriptive expression. However, this style, on occasion and in the essays which were of an average or below-average standard, often included some rather purple prose with some common unidiomatic expressions: 'by time' being a prevalent example.
- vi. One of the most highly effective essays came about by a candidate answering Question 1, 'Walking on stilts.' This particular essay was the stand out paper in the batch because of its unique and powerful approach to the subject. It was original in thought and in structure and was executed with excellent language skills. The remaining papers, fourteen

in all, were far less impressive and were usually based on a poorly developed plot and limited character development. Very few demonstrated what could be considered Advanced level language skills in terms of structure or vocabulary. The collective response showed a certain lack in imagination. As with previous poor attempts at some titles, an obvious lack in sentence structure, paragraphing and punctuation was evident.

- vii. Title 7, 'Independence of thought', produced some good responses and was usually tackled as a discursive piece. The better papers were original, thoughtful, analytical and critical, whilst achieving a high level of language skills. The middling papers, which were the majority, usually offered a reasonably considered argument, and whilst their structure was cohesive and cogent, they rarely critically analysed the argument with the richness of vocabulary or complexity of grammatical structure that the better writers achieved. There were very few poor papers for this title.
- viii. The fourth most popular title was a single word challenge, 'Speed.' Most candidates chose to construct a narrative that ranged from poorly considered and constructed through to very complex, well-conceived and very well executed. Some, very few, tried a discursive piece, but most of these failed to construct an essay that had strong argumentation and high-level writing skills. The essays that struggled to discuss the concept of speed were lacking in structure, vocabulary and argumentation.
- ix. Finally, the least chosen title was Question 5, which was usually approached as a for-and-against essay. This title was not very easy to tackle, and the nature of the topic clearly put many off. Those who did attempt it were not overly successful in creating a valid and complex enough argument for a very high grade. Some, indeed, failed to understand the title itself and thus wrote out of context or failed to provide an argument at all. The nature of language used was usually middle to low in terms of quality.
- x. More focus needs to be placed on paragraphing, sentence structure and punctuation if the quality standard of those lower on the rating scale is to be enhanced and improved. Likewise, more attention should be paid to tense choice, structure and organization, and emphasis on expanding the candidates' vocabulary through wider reading is highly recommended.

Section B: Summary

- i. The May 2018 paper included a passage set as summary that should have proved both accessible and intriguing for the students sitting for the examination, featuring, as it did, a subject that has been debated almost endlessly of late, especially across different formats of the media.
- ii. Perhaps the most encouraging aspect of the attempts to this task was the number of replies that successfully included the majority of the salient points required by the question. At least half of the candidates were able to incorporate a good four out of six possible items listed as essential elements of the summary paragraph. Naturally, this refers to students who displayed a minimally fair or reasonably good understanding of the extract's content, and were able to demonstrate this in a clear manner through their use of language.
- iii. A slightly greater percentage of students obtained marks belonging to the higher band (between 12 and 15 out of a possible 15) than in previous years. Most answers were also relatively well structured, considering the slew of badly-constructed paragraphs experienced in earlier years.
- iv. On the other hand, many summaries were blighted by grammatical errors, mostly in terms of verb conjugation or the incorrect use of tenses (the Simple Past instead of the Present or Past Perfect, for instance – in some rare cases, even the Future Simple in place of the Simple Past or Simple Present). Very often, however, errors in expression also related to mistakes concerning diction, the use of inappropriate style as well as the incorrect use of linking words (for example, beginning a summary with 'however' or 'moreover'), and the substitution of a word with a similar-sounding, but nonetheless incorrect one.
- v. Also worth highlighting is the style of writing of some candidates, which unfortunately affected their presentation of the passage's content. Rather than beginning their

summaries with an adequate introductory sentence, many simply plunged into the subject by starting off with, for instance, 'the debate'. A percentage of answers also exhibited problems relating to the lack of directness in the language, leading to circumlocution and thus vagueness, with the eventual result that, in some answers, only a single point or a couple of points were directly identified.

- vi. Another issue was the misrepresentation of information in the passage – for instance, the subtleties of language being lost on certain candidates. A case in point involves the article discussed in the extract used in the examination, which is compared, in the soberness of its tone, to a 'horror story'. The euphemistic term was quite broadly misunderstood, with a fair percentage of candidates mistaking an opinion piece (based on facts, however controversial or debatable) for pure fiction.
- vii. Format-based inconsistencies included answers in which candidates did not structure the information into a single paragraph; quoting directly from the passage; the attempt to analyse the passage stylistically or content-wise, treating it similarly to a prose criticism task; and, finally, not observing the word limit. Word count needs to be observed very stridently, particularly given the generous leeway afforded by the set word limit (150-200 words.) Unfortunately, some of the better answers were penalized for going over the word limit, as their eloquent style in rendering the passage in a concise and cogent manner was marred by the inattention to this crucial detail.
- viii. In more linguistically concrete terms, oversights seen in replies very often consisted of grammatical errors other than the ones already mentioned above, such as the misuse of phrasal verbs and erroneous use of prepositions – one of the most common ones – and an inability to distinguish between the use of the gerund and the infinitive. Answers were also regularly seen to fall short on punctuation, with the presence of superfluous commas or the utter lack thereof, often affecting sentence structure. Some candidates made use of tapering, unwieldy sentences, while others omitted necessary clauses. Particularly weak answers in terms of grammar also faltered on basic questions of pronoun/ noun pairing as far as the use of plurality went, such as 'this scenarios', as well as the now sadly almost ubiquitous 'it's/ its' substitution. Lastly, some replies were replete with spelling mistakes and/or grammatical errors.

Section C: Linguistics

Statistical Data for Section C

Section C: Linguistics		Number of candidates
	1	131
	2	88
	3	458

General Comments

- i. There was a significant improvement in candidates' performance in the Linguistics section. In fact, the average mark achieved was 22 out of 33, an increase of around 3.5 marks over last year's performance. This improvement should be attributed to the fact that close to 68% of candidates (more than two thirds of candidates) opted for and tended to do very well in Question 3, which consisted of two tasks/ exercises, involving identification of morphemes in a number of words set, and identification of SUBJECT and OBJECT elements in a number of sentences set. In this kind of question, candidates who are reasonably well prepared, especially in those areas in the syllabus referred to as Language Frameworks, tend to achieve excellent or very high scores as their response involves providing the correct answer and /or identification, rather than having to express their knowledge and understanding through the writing of coherent and well- structured essays. In general, it would be safe to say, like in previous years, that candidates are reasonably well prepared for this section of the examination, but candidates' choice of question led to a higher average mark overall.

- ii. It is important to remind candidates that their responses to the various questions set need to show evidence of knowledge and understanding of topic / concepts, that they should provide the necessary detail and depth in explanations, and that candidates need to use appropriate terminology in defining, explaining or writing about certain topics.
- iii. Finally, as far as the essay question is concerned, it is important to remind candidates of the need for clear, accurate and coherent writing.

Question 1:

The linguist David Crystal writes, 'More than anything else, language shows we belong, providing the most natural badge, or symbol of public and private identity.' Focusing on dialects, sociolects and idiolects, write an essay of not more than 400 words on variety in language.

- i. In this question, candidates were expected to define and explain in some detail the three main concepts of user-variation in language, specifically dialects, sociolects and idiolects. Candidates were also expected to present relevant examples in order to illustrate their explanations, and to show how people's use of language may provide information about their regional, social and personal backgrounds.
- ii. In more specific terms, candidates were expected to define and explain in detail the concept of variation in language use by groups of people on the basis of geographical/ regional location (dialects), the factors involved in determining how people's membership of particular social groups may influence their use of language (sociolects), and finally how as individuals we all have distinctive characteristics in the way we use language (idiolects). Candidates were also expected to provide relevant examples to support and illustrate their explanations.
- iii. Around 19% of the candidates opted to answer this question. A few of these essays (7.5 %) were excellent in terms of knowledge of the concepts involved, depth of explanation, relevance and variety of examples, as well as the overall quality in expression, coherence and structure of the essay. The quality of most of the responses (close to 54%) ranged from the good to the very good. The essays of these candidates demonstrated a sound knowledge of the concepts/ terms involved, provided reasonably accurate explanations of the various aspects involved, and mentioned a few examples to support their explanations. What distinguished the excellent essays from the good and very good ones were depth and accuracy of detail in explanation and use of examples, and clarity and coherence in their writing skills.
- iv. On the other hand, there were some responses which can be described as unsatisfactory in various ways and to various degrees, ranging from average (17.5%) to poor (21%). The main weaknesses were the following:
 - Poor, limited, and vague understanding of the concepts/ terms involved, thus showing lack of knowledge and study of topic (especially noticeable in their understanding of dialect, the characteristic features of a dialect, the differences between dialect and accent, confusion between Standard English and Received Pronunciation, and their relevance within the context of the question);
 - Inaccurate explanations and limited understanding of the other two concepts that were relevant to the question, that is, the four factors that characterise sociolect, and what influences one's idiolect;
 - Lack of appropriate terminology in the explanation of terms and concepts, especially with regards to *dialects*;
 - Irrelevant information concerning issues (e.g. Conversation Theory, Cooperative Principle, Creole, historical development of the English language, global status of English, experiments that demonstrate social attitudes to language use) that had very little or no connection with the topic;
 - Very few, if any, examples were provided as a means of supporting the definitions and/ or explanations which were in themselves vague and inaccurate;
 - Extremely poor use of language and expression which significantly affected coherence.

Question 2:

In linguistics, semantics is concerned with the study of words and meanings. Write a short paragraph on each of these six terms. Each paragraph must be around 60 words long and must include: a) a detailed explanation of the term; b) an example or examples to support the explanation.

The examples you use must be taken from the paragraph about snakes given under the list of terms.

i. Denotation

ii. Connotation

iii. Hyponym

iv. Synonym

v. Antonym

vi. Lexical field

(paragraph about snakes).

- i. This question required candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of the core aspects of Semantics, and specifically the meaning relationship between words, also referred to as sense relations. These are the terms listed in the question. Candidates were expected to write 60 word paragraphs in which they clearly and accurately define and explain each term, by using appropriate linguistic terminology, and identify an example, or examples, of the term from the paragraph about snakes that was provided for them (a case of applying their knowledge of sense relationships by selecting a relevant example from the paragraph given).
- ii. This question was selected by approximately 13 % of candidates and was therefore the least favoured option. Of these candidates, slightly more than 11 % achieved an excellent score on the basis of clear, accurate and detailed definitions/ explanations and a correct identification of the relevant example from the paragraph provided. There were also around 74 % of candidates whose responses were graded as being good to very good, as they presented appropriate and clear definitions with perhaps slight inaccuracies in their expression, and correct examples taken from paragraph. Unfortunately, 15% of candidates produced unsatisfactory answers as a result of varying degrees of weaknesses, inaccuracies and lack of understanding. The following were the main weaknesses in these responses:
 - Vague, ambiguous, confusing and incorrect definition and explanation of a semantic term; there were some serious problems in using language to correctly define a particular sense relation;
 - Confusion of terms, such as in explaining the difference in the meaning of HYPONYMY and HYPERNYMY, or HYPONYMY and LEXICAL FIELDS; as well as the difference between DENOTATION and CONNOTATION;
 - Very short, brief and sketchy definitions of terms which did not really provide evidence of understanding, as well as the lack of appropriate terminology in explaining such terms; this was clearly evident in some candidates' definitions of SYNONYMY, and ANTONYMY.
 - Incorrect identification of examples from the paragraph provided; in some cases, especially in CONNOTATION, HYPONYMY and SEMATIC FIELDS some candidates displayed their lack of understanding by virtue of the examples they presented.
 - Inaccuracy in use of language and sentence structure which led to incoherent expression.

Question 3: TWO TASKS / EXERCISES.

a. Identification of types of MORPHEMES by segmenting the set SEVEN words, according to instructions and example given in rubric;

b. Identification of the SUBJECT and OBJECT (2 of the Clause Elements) in ELEVEN sentences set, according to instructions and example given in rubric.

- i. This was by far the most popular choice for candidates; in fact, close to 68 %, or slightly more than two-thirds, of all candidates answered this question. One possible explanation for such a high percentage of candidates opting for this question is that candidates feel that these kinds of tasks present less of a challenge because they specifically test their linguistic knowledge and thus do not require candidates to articulate and express their knowledge and understanding in coherent and correct language. These are tasks which can only be set on specific topics in the syllabus, that is, the ones referred to as Language Frameworks/ Basics, and for which clear instructions and an example of how to work out the tasks are given in the rubric. The nature of these types of tasks gives candidates the possibility of achieving a very high score and thus achieve excellent results. As mentioned earlier in the introduction to this report, this may have led to a significantly better performance in general by Advanced level candidates in this section this year.
- ii. Candidates who opted for this question did extremely well in this question. Slightly more than 30% got an excellent result, while around 32% got a very good mark. This means that close to two-thirds of the candidates (62.5 %) performed extremely well and thus demonstrated their understanding and knowledge of both morphology (exercise A), and the two clause elements, (exercise B), required in their analysis of word- formation and sentence structure. There were 27% of candidates (slightly more than one fourth) who achieved a good result, because there were some weaknesses and inaccuracies in their analyses. Finally, there were a few candidates (about 10%) who did poorly in this question. The reasons for this are presented below in terms of specific weaknesses and inaccuracies for each task.
- iii. Task A required candidates to identify the different morphemes and indicate the type of morpheme in each of the seven words set, according to a model example. Candidates who achieved an unsatisfactory score or even performed poorly in this task encountered the following difficulties:
 - Errors in correctly identifying FREE and BOUND morphemes, especially in the words antidepressants, argumentation, multimillionaires, and messiness; in a few cases some candidates confused morphemes with syllables.
 - Confusion and misunderstanding between DERIVATIONAL and INFLECTIONAL morphemes (some candidates are not aware of the fact that INFLECTIONAL morphemes can only be found at the very end of a word as the final suffix, and certainly not as a prefix; other candidates incorrectly identified the -LY suffix as inflectional rather than derivational, still others included what they considered erroneously as more than ONE inflectional morpheme for a particular word);
 - Not following the instructions and example given in order to present a clear and accurate analysis of the word set;
- iv. Task B required candidates to identify correctly and fully the SUBJECT and OBJECT elements in each of the eleven sentences set, according to the instructions and model example given in the rubric. Candidates who achieved an unsatisfactory score or who did poorly in this task encountered the following difficulties:
 - Accurate and correct identification of SUBJECT and OBJECT clause elements (if present) in the eleven sentences set; this involved accuracy in identifying FULL element, involving pre- and post-modification of headword where applicable; some candidates only identified the head word and thus lost marks;
 - Confusion between SUBJECT and OBJECT elements, thus demonstrating lack of knowledge of these elements;
 - Complement and Adverbial elements in sentences set were incorrectly identified as OBJECTS or even SUBJECTS, thus showing poor understanding and knowledge of the clause elements;

- Surprisingly, a number of students, for some reason or other did not analyse sentence no viii (8);

Final observations about Linguistics:

- i. On the whole, candidates' performance in the Linguistics section is satisfactory. However, it is important to stress that candidates need to study all the topics and areas as prescribed in the syllabus. Candidates need to be reminded that questions set in the exam may include 1) essays on various topics prescribed in syllabus, 2) detailed analyses of non-literary written texts as prescribed in syllabus, 3) detailed explanatory paragraphs about specific concepts related to certain topics as well as identifying practical examples of these concepts from a set paragraph; 4) various types of exercises and tasks which are intended to assess candidates' knowledge of certain linguistic concepts/ terms. Finally, knowledge of appropriate linguistic terminology, and accurate and coherent expression are especially important for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the various topics prescribed in the syllabus.

General Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, we note that:

- i. The marginal improvement in the percentages of students attaining A-C and A-E is offset by less As, Bs, and Ds. Excellence was lacking in a general performance that may be described as 'average'.
- ii. The percentage of candidates missing the written component of the exam is still high (10.7%), though lower than last year. These numbers have to be taken into consideration when evaluating general performance.
- iii. As in previous years, one of the markers' main concerns was the candidates' use of language in the written components. We would like to reiterate that no amount of knowledge of the assigned texts will compensate for weak use of English in this exam. Candidates who aspire to do well or even pass the exam need to understand that accuracy, clarity, and fluency of expression are a must and not simply a bonus.
- iv. Apart from use of English, another generally weak aspect of the candidates' performance concerns literary criticism, especially prose. Unfortunately, this is becoming a trend that is not showing any signs of improvement. Most candidates lack the critical acumen and the literary sensitivity to write convincing critiques of both poetry and prose. However, this is particularly evident in prose criticism, which requires skills and knowledge that are often also required for poetry criticism but that are sometimes different. In particular, many candidates find the analysis of point of view, focalisation, voice, style, and tone particularly prohibitive, and only rarely show that they have fully understood how characterisation, theme, situation and setting function in given prose passages.
- v. It is felt that many candidates are sitting for the exam with insufficient exposure to and familiarity with literature and the literary. The skills required in practical criticism cannot simply be 'learned' or 'memorised' but can only be *acquired* through frequent and intensive encounters by candidates with literary texts both in and outside of the lecture room. Candidates need to practise writing about literature more frequently and need to read as widely and extensively as possible. This is particularly important for them to be better able to evaluate and critique prose, especially, voice, tone and style.
- vi. We note that the gobbet components in the exam still remain problematic for many candidates, though gobbet responses in Shakespeare were better than usual this year. Essays

tend to use the passage given as a springboard for a discussion of some elements of the text and do not remain grounded enough in the given passage. A gobbet question primarily requires candidates to analyse the passage given in terms of its significance in relation to the text as a whole, and it requires the candidates to give a focused discussion of the specific extract chosen.

- vii. Another aspect of the candidates' writing that was markedly poor overall was relevance. Too many candidates lost many marks for writing essays that are partly or completely irrelevant to the specific rubric of the question chosen. Candidates cannot ignore the rubric in order to present loosely relevant rehearsed material but must address the specificities of the rubric.
- viii. Although quoting extensively from the texts is not always required, the ability to refer closely and incisively to the texts (both unseen and assigned) is a crucial skill that is highly regarded by the markers of the exam.
- ix. We would like to commend the excellent general performance in Linguistics, and the continuous improvements in the summary and the oral.
- X. Finally, we would like to encourage the candidates of this exam to read as much as possible; practise their writing consistently; take the time to improve their critical skills and knowledge of language and literature; and to learn to appreciate even further the importance of accuracy, clarity, and, ideally, style in their writing.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2018