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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE (NEW)  
SUBJECT ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**SUMMER 2018**

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## **GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (WALES)**

### **GCSE (NEW)**

**Summer 2018**

### **UNIT 1: ORACY**

For this entry, the generic topics for the Individual Researched Presentation remained the same: Wales, Leisure, The World of Work, The World of Science/Technology and Citizenship. The task for Responding and Interacting – Group Discussion was a choice between ‘Should exotic animals be kept as pets?’, ‘Litter – how big a problem is it?’ and ‘Work experience for 15 and 16 year olds. What do you think?’ Each of these appeared to engage candidates across the ability and age range.

#### **Administration**

This year’s entries, apart from Colleges, were mostly of Year 11 candidates and quite a number were candidates who were re-sitting, having made initial entries last year when in Year 10. Centres appeared more confident about recording candidates in either audio-visual or audio formats, and generally the organisation of the samples was much more straightforward than had been the case for the first entries last year. There were, however, still issues with incomplete recordings which had not been substituted and late arrival of samples without prior permission.

Best practice included arranging the recordings in rank order with a file containing both tasks for each candidate and also including, perhaps, a digital copy of the record sheet. More recordings were sent on USBs, though there were some issues of accessing the recordings when the files were encrypted. This was as a result of recent data protection changes and did cause some difficulties at times. The best examples included a clear introduction for each task by the teacher, giving the date of the recording, centre number and name and candidate details, followed by an introduction to the candidate or candidates. It was also very helpful when there was indication of when more than one of the candidates appeared in a particular group discussion.

For audio recordings, allowing each candidate to introduce themselves clearly was also important. Some record sheets helpfully noted the first words of candidates and also when they spoke – for example the second speaker in the group. It was pleasing to note an increase in the number of centres where groups of three candidates were used for the Group Discussion, as this really enabled more interaction and opportunity to contribute. There were still, unfortunately, examples of larger group sizes, with four commonly used, but as many as six or seven also in evidence. This really disadvantaged candidates and when these larger groups were audio recordings of all boys or girls, and little introduction was made, identification of individual candidates became extremely difficult. There appeared to be more examples of candidates working in pairs and this was often less successful as there was often little difference in their views.

The timing of the two tasks was generally adhered to more, with fewer examples of either very brief or over long tasks.

Of real concern was the use of notes and prompt cards, where there were still many examples of, effectively, scripts for both tasks, despite the clear messages given in the two previous reports and at CPD that, for the Individual Researched Presentation ‘It is not permissible for the presentation to be scripted. It must be emphasised that this is not a

reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate.’ For Interacting and Responding – Group Discussion it is also made clear that ‘No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.’ Not all notes were sent, or appeared to be edited versions of those actually used by the candidates. The greatest difficulties arose with audio recordings where it was not possible to observe the candidates’ use of their notes, though the manner of presentation was strongly indicative of reading. This applied to both tasks and there were a number of examples of centres where notes for the group discussion were not sent and had clearly been used.

Record sheets were generally helpfully completed with detailed comments relating to both the criteria and also to specific skills shown by the candidate. These often included brief quotations of the candidates’ words and mention of points in the recording for reference. What was not in evidence in many centres was any indication of internal moderation.

## **Task setting**

### **Individual Researched Presentation**

The five set tasks provided ample scope for candidates and, once again, moderators were impressed by some of the considerable talent and confidence displayed by candidates. There were some outstanding examples, including speaking about being a foster carer, inequality in girls’ education and whether technology is ruining the creative minds of children. These were all from one centre where it was clear that candidates had been able to select a topic of personal interest and which also allowed access to the higher bands in the criteria.

There were fewer examples of all candidates being given the same task and only one or two individuals who used the same topic – for example work experience – for both tasks.

More candidates chose to try to persuade their audience and this was successful as it moved them beyond conveying simple information. It was a pity that many of these presentations appeared to be given to just the teacher or teachers, or perhaps a small number of other candidates. This made interaction with the audience and potential engagement with their peers difficult, especially when it came to asking questions. This was an area where candidates could really show their enthusiasm and knowledge, but use of closed questions or pre-prepared ones (with prepared responses) did little to enhance the performance of many.

Use of PowerPoint was generally supportive, using images to illustrate presentations effectively, though there were still some examples of candidates reading from material on the slides. Use of video material can also be misguided. One particular candidate showed ‘YouTube’ clips of Extreme Experiments and made a few brief, often inaudible, comments about them, usually in response to a teacher question. This was not helpful.

‘Wales’ was again a popular topic, with a number of interesting aspects used. Whether Cardiff should host the Olympics, why people should visit Wales and the pros and cons of being Welsh were all used effectively. Arguing why Welsh should not be taught proved interesting, and one candidate, who was clearly very proud to be Welsh, spoke passionately about the Welsh Parliament. The tradition of magic in Wales was also explored. A number of candidates promoted areas of the country and while this was somewhat limiting in aspects of complexity, it did allow many candidates to convey some detailed information and to show enthusiasm for their local areas.

‘Leisure’ was again very popular with candidates using their own experience of particular sports and hobbies to convey information to their audience and also in many cases trying to persuade the audience to try the sport or hobby themselves. There was a variety of sports

covered, including traditional ones such as netball, horse riding and fishing and those less common such as Tough Mudder and the benefits of being in the Cadet Force. Football featured quite strongly, covering aspects such as the disparity between footballers' wages and those of professionals such as doctors, the armed forces or people in the fire service. The introduction of VAR technology also appeared here, though could equally have been suited to 'The World of Science/Technology'.

A number of candidates looked at the link between such leisure activities as music and art and their impact on mental health.

'The World of Work' was again used in connection with discussions on the value of work experience or a dream job. This was probably the least popular topic.

'The World of Science and Technology' was again popular, and covered a range of quite challenging topics such as the impact of social media on body image, various aspects of the use of mobile phones and computers, and gaming. There were arguments to promote the health benefits of gaming as well as looking at the negative aspects of technology. This whole area is clearly one which candidates relate to. One centre used an overall task of giving a sales' pitch for a new phone-related product. This proved engaging to both the candidates and the moderator.

Various aspects of science were explored by some candidates including stem cell research and animal testing. These were, again, a product of candidates' own interests.

'Citizenship', while probably less popular, produced some very challenging topics, such as whether the police should carry guns, gender inequality and the voting age. Of particular challenge was a candidate who posed the question 'Is equity superior to equality?'

There were, again, some topics which really did not comply with any of the broad topic areas. It is important that teachers are mindful of this and discourage candidates who wish to speak about Mexican drug cartels or, unfortunately, the long overused 'Room 101'.

The use of prompt cards continues to be an issue, and candidates really must be taught how to make suitable prompts/bullet points and move away from reading.

### **Responding and Interacting – Group Discussion**

While a number of groups of candidates engaged in lively, spontaneous discussion, far more went through a sequence of rehearsed, polite exchanges, often read from detailed notes in front of them. It was pleasing that more candidates were in groups of three, which clearly allowed for more interaction. Candidates in groups of four or more were at a disadvantage as seldom did all participate fully. A mix of gender was also often good at sparking opinions. There were still some examples of a chairperson being used who did not go beyond managing the others in the group and therefore was unable to achieve a great deal, and also some candidates were still being assigned roles. This is not part of the task and should be strongly discouraged as it often limited the ability of candidates to contribute in any meaningful way.

Audio recordings, as already mentioned, proved particularly challenging for the moderator in identifying candidates, particularly in larger groups. It would appear that these recordings could not have been moderated as this issue would have been clear to any listener. Use of names within the recordings was very helpful in many cases and should be encouraged.

The three topic areas, 'Should exotic animals be kept as pets?', 'Litter – how big a problem is it?' and 'Work experience for 15 and 16 year olds. What do you think?' proved accessible and it was of interest to the moderators that so many candidates owned exotic pets.

Indeed, the topic on exotic pets proved the most popular. Candidates used their own experience and also researched aspects of the exotic pet trade to inform their discussion. This provided ample material and there were some lively discussions.

The topic of litter was probably the next most used task, and there was plenty of reference to local areas and types of litter, extending to discussion about the problems of plastics which had been a feature of the recent 'Blue Planet' series. Candidates were clearly concerned about the impact on their own environment while in many cases recognising that they did create some of the problems themselves. Issues of responsibility arose, with some arguing that it was often seen as someone else's problem rather than their own.

Work experience was of particular interest to those who had either taken part or had not had the opportunity. There was scope for evaluation here and there were some strong views about the value of the experience, both positive and negative.

It was encouraging that many candidates were able to put forward arguments and sustain a point of view. It was disappointing that there were still a large number who were reliant on reciting rehearsed statements or reading from prepared notes. There is clearly much to be done in teaching candidates the skills of giving a point of view, listening to others and responding appropriately. It was pleasing that more centres had used audio-visual recordings here as it was possible to see how candidates responded to each other by tacit agreement and close listening.

In some cases, teacher intervention in the groups was both unnecessary and inhibiting. Candidates who were able to discuss with each other were sometimes prevented from doing so by closed teacher questions. While this can be necessary with candidates at the lower end of the range, those nearer the top of the range should be left to develop their own ideas.

## **Assessment**

A number of centres worked very hard to provide an exemplary sample of candidates' work, supported by detailed and informative record sheets. Tasks were appropriate and challenging for the best candidates and accessible for the weaker candidates. Materials were accessible and well organised. There had clearly been internal moderation and seldom were marks in question.

However, a greater number of centres were less well organised. The lack of internal moderation in particular resulted in some anomalous assessments, with generosity being most common. As was the case last year, brevity of tasks was not taken into consideration, especially for the Individual Researched Presentations. Combined with giving straightforward information, examples like this cannot go beyond Band 2.

Despite strong advice, reading of scripts is still in evidence and is not being either discouraged or impacting on teacher assessment. Lack of transparency in audio recordings is prevalent here in many cases, and it is of great concern that some teachers have expressed misgivings about using audio-visual recordings as they feel that this is disadvantaging their candidates. I can emphatically deny this. Indeed, the ability to observe the candidates and see how they interact with their audience or within their group, as well as seeing how they use their notes, has clear advantages for the moderator. Assessments for audio-visual recordings were generally much more secure and I would strongly advise the use of audio-visual recordings for this unit of work.

It must be recognised that Oracy contributes a significant proportion of the marks for the qualification as a whole. There is some feeling among the moderators that the importance of these tasks is not always recognised and that some centres are not teaching candidates the necessary skills, nor giving them opportunity to practice these skills, before the actual assessments taken place.

In an increasingly screen-focused world, the importance of face-to-face communication cannot be over-emphasised.

## GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (WALES)

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2018

### UNIT 2

#### Theme: Overseas Volunteering Experiences

#### Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. In overview, candidates were provided with five reading texts of different types for this examination. All were based on the theme of Overseas Volunteering Experiences.

This was the third Unit 2 examination of the new specification. There was a range of question types and the texts provided a balance of continuous and non-continuous writing in relation to voluntourism and overseas volunteering experiences. There were no unexpected question types that had not been seen in the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs). The theme appeared to have been of interest to candidates and there was no shortage of effort across the examination.

The untiered element of this paper always provides a challenge with regard to paper setting to meet the requirements of the full range of ability represented within the candidature. As with previous examinations in this specification though, the texts proved accessible, to varying degrees, for the majority of candidates. As is always the case, there was a small minority who were less effective in approach, perhaps proving unsuccessful in the timing of the examination or who were unwilling to apply themselves to the materials presented. It is pleasing to reflect that these cases were relatively rare.

#### Reading

##### **A1. In what year was Projects Abroad founded?**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This was a straightforward location question intended to enable candidates to immediately engage with the information presented in the non-continuous writing of Text A. The text type, a website page which advertised overseas volunteering opportunities, should have held few surprises and was easily navigated by most candidates. The majority of candidates answered the question successfully – the answer ‘1992’ was easily located in the bottom left portion of the text and was presented in emboldened text. It was sufficient to copy this date directly from the text although some candidates did elect to write it out in words. Both approaches were valid. Overall, this question appeared to allow the vast majority of candidates to engage with the text, isolate the pertinent information and answer the question.

##### **A2. Which of the following is NOT offered by Projects Abroad?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question was presented with multiple-choice options. It proved reasonably straightforward although all of the incorrect alternatives also featured in the text. It was essential that candidates read the question carefully and were sure of what information they were being asked for in addition to carefully reading the text. As ever, some candidates failed to read the instructions adequately and tried to tick multiple options or, in some cases, attempted to write in an additional point. In these circumstances, no marks were given.

**A3. List three things you can do to get further information about Projects Abroad?**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This was a straightforward question where most candidates were able to accumulate marks. Candidates were awarded one mark for each appropriate answer, up to total mark of three. There appeared to be few barriers to success with this question and it was certainly attempted by the majority of candidates. The most common mistake occurred when candidates produced extremely brief responses and failed to answer the question. To access the marks, it was necessary to engage with the part of the question which asked what readers 'can do'. For example, those candidates who wrote 'request a brochure' were fully engaged with the question, the 'request' being what the reader could 'do'. However, those who merely wrote 'brochure' were not really engaged with the question and such brief and unhelpful answers were not credited. The mark scheme provided six or seven possible suggestions for what candidates might include but examiners were instructed that alternatives were likely and that they ought to reward any valid alternatives. With such a potentially interactive text, it was clear that candidates might suggest, for example, that readers may 'click' or 'press' on quite a number of different hypertext links in order to access additional information.

**A4. Which of the following statements best explains the term 'voluntourism'?**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.*

This question was asked in relation to Text B, which was a continuous piece of writing. It was presented as a multiple-choice question and it was essential that candidates applied a careful reading of the text. The question proved reasonably straightforward although there were credible distractors included in the answers available for selection. The fourth answer, 'visiting developing countries to work as a volunteer', was the correct answer, and this could be inferred from a careful reading of the second paragraph of Text B. Whilst the distractors all related in some way to either volunteering, tourism or 'gap' years, only the fourth answer could be considered the 'best' explanation of the term 'voluntourism'.

**A5. Name two concerns affecting children who are forced to live in institutions, according to Lumos.**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This proved to be a straightforward question with most candidates able to retrieve at least one, if not both pieces of information required to answer the question. Text B was adapted from a news story in a national newspaper about JK Rowling's well-publicised criticism of 'voluntourism'. The question asked what 'concerns' affect children forced to live in institutions according to Lumos (the charity founded by JK Rowling). The answers here related to the fact that children are denied 'loving and caring relationships' (it was also possible to present this as children suffering from 'family break up') and that children's brain

development could be damaged by the situations they find themselves in. Overall, this question appeared to allow candidates to engage with the text and question.

**A6. This factsheet explains that Lumos has ‘provided 1,418 interventions to help save the lives of children’. Select one of the definitions from the list below which best describes an “intervention” in this context.**

*This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to interpret meaning.*

This was the first question on Text C. It was presented as a multiple-choice question and it was essential that candidates looked carefully at the word ‘intervention’ in the context of the text. The word could be easily located in the first paragraph of the text. Whilst the majority of candidates answered this question correctly, there were still quite a number who did not. The most significant number of incorrect responses, selected the third option ‘giving medical aid or treatment’ which suggests that they were basing their response on prior knowledge of the term or looking specifically at the latter part of the sentence which refers to ‘medical treatment’. Clearly it is a requirement of this type of question that the distractors feature credible alternatives and candidates were required to isolate the definition that was the ‘best’ fit from the list given. The majority of candidates were able to do this.

**A7. List two ways in which Lumos has made a difference to the children and their families.**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

To ensure they answered this question correctly, candidates need to make sure they were clear and precise in their response. Again, the majority were able to do this and there were few barriers to entry here. It was essential that if numbers were quoted they clearly related to the point or points candidates were making – errors occurred where numbers became mixed up, confused or copied inaccurately. Candidates who were too brief in their response and didn’t fully cover the point being made were also less likely to succeed. For example, responses that very vaguely suggested ‘prevented almost 15,000 from being admitted’ or ‘influenced changes to give them better futures’ were not specific enough to gain marks. In the first example it was absolutely necessary to make it clear that Lumos made a difference by preventing ‘almost 15,000 children’ from being ‘admitted to institutions’ and in the second example it needed to be clear that the ‘changes’ being referred to were ‘changes in the law’.

**A8. Explain what Lumos means when they refer to their ‘100% pledge’.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning and ideas.*

Successful answers to this question were able to demonstrate an understanding that the ‘100% pledge’ refers to the fact that Lumos promises that all donations received will be used for Lumos projects and/or that none will be directed towards the charity’s administrative costs. Candidates needed to be able to interpret the phrase and demonstrate their understanding through brief explanation. Those who copied the quote ‘100% of the money you give to Lumos will go directly to Lumos projects and not to administrative costs’ did not demonstrate the necessary understanding of what they had read. There were many approaches taken to this question and some candidates, as in previous years, perhaps wrote more than was necessary in order to get to the correct answer. The best answers were clear and tried to engage with the phrase and its context. It was clear that some candidates struggled to interpret the text in relation to this question and were therefore unable to offer a valid explanation.

**A9. Look at the first paragraph of this text.**

**a.) Name one volunteering activity that was organised for the college students.**

**b.) Name one activity the students did in their free time.**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Candidates focused on Text D to answer this question. This proved a very straightforward task with the vast majority able to correctly identify an activity for both parts of this question. Incorrect answers tended to follow specific patterns. For the first part of the question, candidates who were too general and wrote of students 'volunteering in disadvantaged and poverty-stricken communities' did not identify one of the organised activities and were unable to gain marks. Those candidates who confused the two types of activities and wrote them in the wrong answer slots were also unable to gain marks. There were a number of candidates who wrote their answers in the wrong places but then clearly indicated to the examiner that they realised what they had done and actually intended their answer for the first part to be submitted for the second part and vice versa. In these cases, and where the right answer(s) were apparent, candidates were credited.

**A10. What impressions does Ossob Mohamud give of people who take part in voluntourism?**

*This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information in challenging writing and to refer to evidence within texts.*

As expected, this question proved to be one of the more challenging questions on the paper although those candidates who engaged thoroughly with the text and kept the question firmly in mind generally produced successful responses. The question required candidates to explore the impressions created by the writer of the people who participate in voluntourism. The best answers were undoubtedly those which tracked through the text and covered a clear range of impressions. Some ideas were more explicitly presented than others and some candidates approached this with a clear sense of overview as well as being able to look at specific examples. Candidates who were unable to sustain a focus on the question – perhaps diverting to look at Mohamud's thoughts and feelings or to provide their own opinions on the activity – were less likely to accumulate marks. Those candidates who misinterpreted the text and tried to convince the examiner that voluntourists were presented in an overwhelmingly positive way also struggled to make much headway.

**A11. List three positive points that Sam Blackledge makes about the volunteers.**

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This was a straightforward location question and provided candidates with a clear lead in to Text E. One mark was awarded for each correct point, up to a total make of three. The attempt rates were high and most candidates were able to achieve some success with this question. The most common obstacle to accumulating marks occurred when candidates were too brief or non-specific with the information presented. For example, it was important that it was made clear that 'genuine friendships' were formed 'with the locals' if candidates selected that as one of their points. Occasionally candidates overlapped information or details in their answer which may have decreased the marks available to them, or they neglected to notice that the question asked for positive points in relation to the 'volunteers' (not the experience of volunteering). As ever, tracking through the text was beneficial to them here as well as offering preparatory reading for the next question.

**A12. Text D and Text E are about voluntourism. Compare and contrast the writers' experiences of volunteering abroad.**

*This question tested the ability to interpret themes, respond to texts and their subtexts, and use inference and deduction when linking ideas within or across texts.*

Text E was written in response to Text D and as such they were natural partners for the comparison question. The question asked candidates to compare and contrast the experiences of volunteering abroad that were presented in the two texts. Candidates who were clearly focused on the task, able to clearly reference where their information came from and who presented a wide range of points in answer to the question will have accumulated marks here. Although Text D was broadly negative and Text E broadly positive about the experience of volunteering abroad there were subtleties to explore in relation to both of the positions presented and candidates had plenty to look at in terms of reading material and possible points. Examiners were advised not to be prescriptive in terms of the structure of answers and there were different and equally worthy ways to set out an answer to this question. It was interesting however, to see that quite a number of candidates did offer integrated answers. The positioning of the texts themselves in relation to one another perhaps encouraged this approach. It is worth reminding ourselves that this question is not a further test of skills found elsewhere in Unit 2 or Unit 3 – there is no requirement for detailed language analysis or exploration of word meaning – the comparison question simply requires candidates to offer a methodical examination of two or more texts in relation to the question that has been asked.

**Editing**

**A13. Complete the sentence below by using the past tense of the verb given at the end:**

**The instructor ..... me how to reverse the car into a parking space.  
(use the past tense of teach)**

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.*

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out the appropriate word choice. The success rates suggested that the majority of candidates were able to complete this with few problems. Barriers to success came where candidates did not read the instructions properly and completed the sentence with a word of their own choosing, or where candidates were unsure as to the correct use of the past tense of 'teach'. 'Teached' was the most common error here, as might have been expected, but some issues with homophones such as 'torte' also occurred.

**A14. Which of the following sentences is grammatically correct? Tick the box of the sentence you think is correct.**

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.*

This question was presented as multiple-choice with the third answer being correct. The answer was, 'Young people find volunteering to be a rewarding and worthwhile activity'. Again, the success rates suggest that most candidates were well equipped to answer this question correctly. Some of the distractors were perhaps more obviously wrong than others and the next most popular choice was the last answer on the list. One issue that occurred, and this was more obvious on scripts that had been word-processed, was where candidates incorrectly copied out one of the sentences. There were one or two examples of answers that appeared to amalgamate the third and fourth sentences on the list. These answers did not answer the question set, even where they may have produced a grammatically correct sentence, and as such were not credited.

**A15. Circle the word that best fits the meaning of the sentence below:**

**The girl was grateful for the help ..... she would have preferred to have completed the task by herself.**

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.*

This question tested the candidate's ability to work out which word was the best fit in the context of the sentence presented. Success rates were high and candidates were clearly well equipped to answer this type of question. Answers that were presented poorly may have been self-penalising – those who demonstrated multiple crossings-out, for example, without making it clear which answer they actually intended, will not have scored. Elsewhere candidates who tried to select two answers – by circling more than one or by circling one and then writing a different answer in the gap will also not have been credited here. As with previous years, although the instruction is clearly to **circle** the word to be chosen, candidates who have clearly indicated their answer through other means (underlining, ticking, writing in the blank space, for example) will have been credited if they have made the correct selection.

**A16. Read the text below which consists of sentences in the wrong order and show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:**

1. Even so, the queue she decided upon was ridiculously long.
2. "Who's next please?" called the attendant, after what seemed an age.
3. Carefully, she scanned the area to find the shortest queue.
4. She loaded her bags onto a trolley and entered the terminal.
5. After a relatively short taxi journey, Fiona arrived at the airport.

(a) Which sentence should come **first** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.

(b) Which sentence should come **second** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below.

*This question tested the ability to understand texts at text level.*

As with the previous questions of this type, to answer successfully candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences in order to see which sentence fit best into the required location. Again, there was some challenge here but the majority of candidates proved able to determine at least one these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. After a relatively short taxi journey, Fiona arrived at the airport.
2. She loaded her bags onto a trolley and entered the terminal.
3. Carefully, she scanned the area to find the shortest queue.
4. Even so, the queue she decided upon was ridiculously long.
5. "Who's next please?" called the attendant, after what seemed an age.

**Proof Reading**

**B1.** In this question, as with previous proof reading tasks, candidates were asked to read a text, circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.

*This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.*

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The layout of the information appeared to offer few barriers although one or two wrote on their scripts that they struggled to read the final 'Go Volunteer' due to the colour combination. Fortunately, there was no error to be found here so that did not impact upon potential marks. There were many examples of candidates circling the correct error but not always managing to offer the right correction – the unnecessary apostrophe in 'programme's' proving a prime example of this – and as such credit could not always be given.

One point that this report paid some attention to last summer but that would be worth revisiting here, is that this task is not intended for candidates to make suggestions about how they would change the writing generally. They are required to look for and correct errors. Offering suggestions about the alternative phrasing of writing which is correct or additional content which could be included did not prove helpful to them.

## Writing

**B2.** Candidates were given the choice of which task to complete for this question. They were able to choose between:

(a) Write an article for a travel magazine describing somewhere interesting that you have visited.

(b) You see the following in your local newspaper:  
'Young people are selfish. They should all be made to volunteer to help others.'  
Write an essay to explain your views on this subject, giving clear reasons and examples.

Task A was a description writing task which produced some really enjoyable responses. The task was designed to enable candidates to use a range of engaging techniques to produce a piece of travel writing. Better writing tended to feature the clear demonstration of feelings towards a location (or locations) alongside the detailed development of ideas. There was no right or wrong way to approach this task, the production of a well-written, engaging piece of writing that was fully task aware was the order of the day. Coherent, fluent writing that proved able to create a sense of place and interest the reader will have been rightly rewarded. Examiners were instructed that the location chosen by candidates did not matter – it could be local, national, big or small in scope. What they choose to do in relation to the location was all important.

Task B was an exposition writing task and this also produced some detailed responses. Candidates were certainly engaged by this task. Some chose to put heavy emphasis on the discussion around young people being selfish whilst others chose to focus on the topic of volunteering. Overall though, those who tried to feature both elements of the quote in their work, whether in agreement or disagreement, tended to produce the most rounded pieces of writing. Development often came in the form of specific examples of volunteering (or selfishness) and these generally provided engaging content for the reader.

As with last summer, timing did not prove problematic and the vast majority of candidates were able to write in some detail. Where very brief work or incomplete work was produced, this tended to be self-penalising. Candidates who wrote with little sense of either of the set tasks, perhaps writing in response to something they had faced previously or putting forward work that was pre-prepared, also struggled to make much progress.

Once again, errors in written accuracy proved a significant area of concern. Candidates whose work is characterised by numerous errors, a struggle to control tense and agreement, or an inability to punctuate with control and coherence, will struggle. As with last summer, and last November, this is likely to be the most significant factor affecting candidates who do not achieve their desired mark. Through teacher discussions and CPD throughout the year it is clear that there is no easy solution to this issue which is also of significant concern in English departments throughout Wales.

## GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE (WALES)

### GCSE (NEW)

Summer 2018

### UNIT 3

#### Theme: Selfies

#### Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 3 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. Candidates were provided with five different reading texts to enable them to complete this examination. All were based on the theme of selfies.

This was the third Unit 3 examination of the new specification. There were no unexpected question types that had not been seen in the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs) and the topic of selfies was a familiar one to the candidates. Prior knowledge of the topic, however, made no difference to the skills being tested or the achievement of outcomes. Five texts were provided for candidates to read, a balance of continuous and non-continuous, with a combination of text and illustrations. The texts provided readers with some opposing and fairly contentious views about selfies and those who take them.

Across the cohort and ability range it was evident that the majority of candidates were working diligently. As with all examinations, there was a handful of candidates who did not use their time effectively, choosing instead to draw, doodle or write inappropriate comments.

#### 1. What is a selfie?

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

Text A was an accessible text which allowed all candidates to immediately engage with the theme. The first question was a useful introduction to the theme and was a relatively straightforward question, which most candidates managed to answer successfully and efficiently. It was perfectly acceptable to copy down the information from the text. While most candidates were precise in what they chose to write down, clearly referring to the text, a minority chose to shorten or reword the information/pronouns and occasionally rendered their answers meaningless. Very few candidates attempted to produce their own definition based on their own prior knowledge. Overall, this question appeared to allow candidates across the cohort to engage with the text.

#### 2. How many posts are labelled as #selfie on Instagram?

*This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

Again, this question was relatively straightforward although the correct answer was surrounded by some credible distractors (for example #selfies rather than #selfie). Some candidates were unable to disentangle the information but if they read carefully, as most did, they got to the correct answer. Occasionally candidates tried to write down all of the numbers included in the passage rather than being selective. Candidates were not rewarded unless they made a clear selection. Again, candidates did not struggle with this question

although a few were unsuccessful due to carelessness in transferring numbers (e.g. they wrote down 55 billion rather than 55 million).

**3. Explain what is meant when the writer says “selfie-taking has exploded”.**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

Despite being only worth one mark, this question type can be quite tricky. When a candidate is asked to ‘explain what is meant’ they need to engage with the quotation/word/phrase in its entirety. Some will explore most of the words and will get to a clear explanation whilst others will produce an incisive overview to demonstrate their overall understanding. For this phrase, candidates were required to engage with the concept of selfie taking being something that has ‘exploded’. Successful candidates were those who were able to suggest the exponential scale of selfie taking and the fact that it has, quite literally become something that has invaded our lives on an unimaginable scale. Candidates whose language choices were synonymous with mediocrity were usually less successful than those who placed a significant amount of emphasis on the size, scale and rapid nature of this recent trend. In last year’s report it was mentioned that some candidates had unfortunately taken the opportunity to explore techniques and language effects when completing this type of question. I am pleased to report that we did not see such approaches being employed this summer.

**4. What is the purpose of Text B?**

*This question tested the ability to understand and recognise the purpose of a text.*

Although only worth one mark, this is a tricky question as candidates have to apply their understanding of the PISA definitions to a specific text. Text B’s introduction was intended to guide candidates towards the correct answer as it explained that the text had been produced to give ‘instructions’. The PISA definitions inform us that texts which are predominantly written for the purpose of instruction are categorised as educational texts. The majority of candidates read the introduction and then correctly categorised the text. While most gave correct answers, there were a number who made it difficult to determine what their final choice was. Some candidates chose to tick multiple boxes and these responses were not credited.

**5. Text B describes how to take the perfect selfie. Put these stages into the order in which you should complete them by numbering them.**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills when sequencing information.*

To answer this sequence question successfully, candidates had to determine the most likely order of steps. The second answer had been completed for candidates to help them towards success. While most chose the correct sequence, there were some who did not manage to answer correctly. In many cases this was perhaps due to not reading all of the statements correctly. It would, for example, be illogical to begin by striking a pose and then transporting the pose to a suitable location. Likewise, it would also be illogical to begin by taking multiple shots.

As per last summer, a number of candidates were careless in their application of numbers (for example numbering their responses 1-3, or 2-5, rather than 1,3 and 4). Some candidates used the same number on more than one occasion and this was also difficult to credit. Most candidates who used a word processor for the majority of their other questions, chose to hand write this answer in the answer booklet, a decision that ensured their answer was clearly and accurately presented. Others (also word processing) who tried to sequence the

information and then present it using different numbers/letters to the original text often became very confused and struggled to gain reward.

It is certainly worth reinforcing the message that candidates who complete any rough work to help them answer this question, should do so in the space below the question or in the text booklet. Several candidates who tried to work out the sequence in their answer space, made errors and then struggled to communicate their final answer clearly.

**6. The writer uses the following sentence, ‘This will subsequently help you to choose the most flattering picture. What does the word ‘subsequently’ mean in this sentence? Tick the correct box.**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This question was a multiple-choice question and candidates had to select one of four options which they felt best described the meaning of the word. Those who did not understand the word ‘subsequently’ were helped if they located it in the passage and then read the word in context. The sequencing of the information within the correct section of the text facilitated most to unpick the correct meaning. Although most selected the correct answer, with three credible distractors, a number were unsuccessful in their selection.

**7. Summarise the reasons why one teenager does not approve of selfies.**

*This question tested the ability to summarise information.*

Last summer this proved to be a tricky question and a good deal of work has been done at CPD sessions and in the Principal Examiner’s Reports in the last twelve months to convey a clear message about the most successful approach to summary. The CPD guidelines have been included at the end of this section to reiterate the key messages regarding summary skills.

Feedback on this question suggests that the main issue with summary is that so many candidates simply do not summarise. A number of candidates insist on using an ‘evidence-explain’ approach, which is wholly inappropriate for a summary. Quite a number of candidates insist on including lengthy quotations and copying huge swathes of text (much of which is irrelevant).

Text C was a blog made up of two people’s opinions about selfies. Alex, the first student, clearly disapproved of selfies and it was Alex’s views that candidates ought to have accessed to complete this question correctly. Isabel, the other student, approves of selfies and her views were therefore not required to answer this question. The majority of candidates saw the distinction between the two students and very few used information from Isabel’s section to complete the question. Once a candidate had identified the correct section of the text, they simply had to pull out four or five key details and then put these **into their own words**. A number of candidates had been taught to use bullet points to present their information and these also proved to be helpful. Not only did bullet points serve as a helpful tool for encouraging clarity of thought and organization, but they also seemed to encourage candidates to write briefly. Bullet points are not a pre-requisite for success but for those who are tempted to overwrite, they can be helpful. Candidates who are most successful at this question usually have an incisive ability to produce an overview and this skill undoubtedly helps them when tackling other questions.

The following are observations which highlight what is required to produce a successful summary:

- A summary should be an abbreviated version of the original text.
- A summary should be written in a candidate’s own words.

- A summary should not include any analysis or explanation.
- A summary should be concise.
- It is perfectly acceptable for a summary to be written in bullet point form.
- A summary does not need to be written in full sentences.

The following is an example of a response which would be awarded full marks.

*Selfies can be taken at inappropriate places/times and are becoming too common. Selfies make photos meaningless and show that people only think about themselves. The act of taking a selfie can make people rude and thoughtless towards others.*

### **8. What does the word ‘narcissism’ mean?**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This question was a multiple-choice question and candidates had to select one of four options which they felt best described the meaning of the word, ‘narcissism’. A number of candidates clearly understood the meaning of the word but those who didn’t usually found themselves deliberating between the options of ‘vain’ and ‘selfish’. The latter of these two would have worked with the context of the passage and was certainly a credible distractor. The majority of candidates scored well for this question but a number were unsuccessful.

### **9. Explain what Isabel means when she says that, ‘Selfies are a powerful tool for self-expression.’**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

When candidates are given a phrase and are asked to explain the meaning of that phrase, it is vital that they engage with all parts of the phrase – not just one or two words. When trying to answer this question, most candidates focused on both the notion of selfies being a ‘powerful tool’ and a tool for ‘self expression’. Those who only focused on the meaning of ‘self expression’ did not fully explain the meaning of the phrase. A number located the phrase in the text and then simply copied down the sentence which came after it. Again, this was not worthy of credit as it simply did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the whole phrase. When asked to explain, copying of information is not a sensible approach. Overall, candidates who were able to engage with the idea of ‘powerful tool’ as a successful or effective way or mechanism of portraying yourself and your character were successful.

### **10. How does the writer try to persuade us that social media can be an unpleasant part of modern life?**

*This question tested the ability to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.*

This question was, without a doubt, the most challenging of all of the reading questions. The text itself was a demanding one in which the writer presented a view which was certainly not shared with all of the candidates. The writer of text D viewed the act of taking selfies as a ‘superficial’ and unhealthy past time. The passage was crammed with examples of derisory comments and derogatory language about those who take selfies. The writer’s negative view on this hobby was abundantly clear. Candidates, on the whole, were able to see that the writer’s views were negative, but a significant number simply did not read the question closely enough. Candidates across Wales are clearly taught how to approach a ‘how’ type

question. Teachers seem to suggest the kinds of techniques candidates may use to enhance an answer and how to access the higher bands, (with relevant comments about method and analysis). However, so many candidates simply choose to answer their own question. Candidates focused on why the article is realistic, why it is generically persuasive and why they ought to 'read on' (amongst other question types). This was not a helpful approach as it meant that the resulting answers either focused on the wrong evidence or became meaningless and unfocused.

The question required candidates to focus on the word, 'unpleasant'. Those who were able to do so, usually scored well. A number of candidates, who were operating at a higher level, managed to make swathes of incredibly astute observations regarding the acerbic tone of the article and the plethora of unpleasant images created to convince the reader that social media is a 'beast of the most undefeatable proportions'. At the lower end of the cohort, candidates were also able to suggest that the behaviours associated with social media are simply 'not nice'. The style of the response is not a concern, but the focus on the question is a real issue for many candidates and their teachers.

As commented in last year's report, 'How' can be answered in many different ways. This question does not intend to encourage a relentless hunt for technical devices (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question), particularly when some candidates can usually identify devices correctly but have limited sense of how they work and even then, they do not always link them to the relevant section of text/evidence. How questions aim to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer's arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader (any techniques used when conveying their messages can be mentioned and explored, when relevant, but should not be commented on at the expense of clarity and focus). Many candidates who make a decent attempt when answering this question type, do so by mainly concentrating on the content of the passage. Additionally, candidates who work chronologically through the text often produce more coherent and methodical responses. Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information. The very best answers respond to language and consider the way in which the writer's argument develops (with a constant eye to the question).

### **11. Why did the No Makeup Selfie campaign start?**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This was a relatively straightforward question which most candidates managed to answer successfully. The campaign started to support an actress whose appearance was criticised. A wonderful by product of the campaign was the fact that it raised millions of pounds for breast cancer, but this was not a reason for the campaign actually starting. Therefore, those who focused on the charity aspect of the campaign were unsuccessful.

### **12. Identify three pieces of evidence to show that the No Makeup Selfie campaign was very popular.**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This question was also relatively straightforward, but some precision was required in responses. In order to get to the notion of the campaign being considered as 'very popular' candidates were required to be specific in the way in which they answered the question. For example, it was not enough to simply say that 'people tweeted about it' as this did not give any suggestion of the magnitude of its popularity. There were three aspects which candidates could focus on: the money raised, the immediacy (in 24 hours) of the vast numbers of people posting selfies on Instagram and the huge number of people who

tweeted about it in the first week. If candidates covered all three aspects, in detail, they were successful. If a candidate focused solely on the monetary aspect of the campaign, their narrowly focused response would only gain some credit. It is certainly worth reminding candidates that when they are asked to 'list' or 'identify' some information from a text, it is essential that they copy down all of relevant information, not a shorted and often unhelpful statement.

### **13. What is meant by the phrase 'going viral'?**

*This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.*

This question required candidates to focus on eliciting word meaning. Candidates were asked to focus on the meaning of 'going viral' and most explored this in relation to the passage. A small minority explored the phrase more generally and used terms such as 'pathogen', 'medical viruses' and 'infections'. It was felt that such answers demonstrated understanding of the phrase itself and ought to be credited. Once again, scale was of importance. For something to 'go viral' there has to be an exponential or dramatic increase in its popularity. Those candidates who were able to capture the fact that something becomes incredibly popular online or in the realm of social media achieved credit for this question. Those who produced responses which suggested mediocrity or insubstantiality were usually unsuccessful. Vague responses were also difficult to credit.

### **14. Selfies can positively affect people's lives. Synthesise the information given from Text C, Text D and Text e that shows this.**

*This question tests the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text, interpret themes, meaning and ideas in a text.*

During last year's CPD, synthesis was one of the skills that some teachers felt less confident about teaching. Synthesis can be defined as the art of 'pulling together from different sources to create something new' and candidates were, on the whole, well versed in what to do when facing a synthesis question. The attempt rates for this question, particularly given its location towards the end of the Reading section, were very positive and the progress that some were able to make here, was also reassuring.

This task required candidates to work across three texts with varying degrees of challenge and to synthesise how selfies can positively affect people's lives. Isabel from text C was perhaps the most unreserved in her view of selfies being a positive force but Text E also made a number of clear assertions to convince the reader that selfies are positive. Text D was, perhaps a little more challenging in the sense that the writer focused mostly on the negative aspects of selfies and the way that they impact upon modern life. However, through the counter arguments presented and some of the undeniable positives about success and connectivity, it was possible to extract a number of key ideas from this text too.

As per the previous series, most candidates attempted this question and were able to draw information from all texts in order to do so. Some were able to present valid reasons succinctly and with little direct reference to the text, but once again the vast majority appeared more comfortable when organising their answers around quoted examples that they had selected from the individual texts. It is important to stress that either approach is valid. There is no requirement for candidates to cite the text of their focus, but again many appeared to do this in order to aid the organisation of their answer and clarify their thoughts. This was one of the highest tariff questions on Section A and was the only question to require an examination of more than one text. This and the space provided for an answer should have indicated to candidates that some time should have been spent providing a full answer to this question. Very brief answers with limited range in the points presented were self-penalising.

Finally, as with the summer, those candidates who attempted to offer comparative points in answer to this question wasted valuable time and sometimes led themselves away from the point of the question.

## **Section B**

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one persuasion and one argumentation) which were linked to the theme studied during the reading section.

### **Task 1**

For their first writing task, candidates were asked to produce a guide for other students persuading them to stay safe when using social media. The aim of the guide was to raise awareness about the importance of safety when using social media, but a number of candidates focused on the more general topic of being safe online and were not penalised for doing so. The audience for the writing was 'other students' and while many candidates wrote about school- based settings, some college students gave advice to other parents and older students.

A guide is perhaps a less common form of writing for most candidates who tend to revise specific formats such as talks, letters and articles. The concept of a 'guide', however, posed no real problems for the candidates. One or two chose to produce a talk but were still able to make a good deal of progress as the content of the talk was suited to the topic and the writing was still organised and paragraphed. Most simply produced a continuous piece of paragraphed writing giving their views and persuading others to make safety conscious choices when operating online.

From the onset it was apparent that this was a topic with which candidates were particularly familiar with. Reassuringly, most candidates seemed well versed in how to keep themselves, their personal details and their accessibility safe when accessing the internet. A wealth of suggestions made across the cohort explained how to check the security of websites and how to check privacy settings when using social media and this was most informative. School and colleges will also be delighted to learn that online information and advice that has been shared during PSHE lessons and during visits from external agencies, such as the police, were frequently cited by students. Candidates were also quick to share anecdotal information about friends who have been careless in their use of the internet and social media. It is an area of modern life where less than desirable characters are able to operate and candidates seemed all too aware of this, although some admitted to taking risks when communicating with unknown people online.

With this type of task, there is always the temptation for candidates to produce emotionally charged writing in which they describe their first-hand experiences, in this case, of strangers online or of online bullying. Occasionally when this happens, candidates tend to lose control of the writing and of the task at hand. Most candidates who chose to tread this route usually managed to ensure that their writing remained on task and that the audience were at the forefront of their minds. A number of examiners commented on the hugely enjoyable and informative writing produced for this topic and it was one which was most enjoyable to mark. Those who chose to rely heavily on the reading sources, were few and far between. The temptation to copy proved too much for some who copied out chunks of the texts and were not rewarded highly for doing so. Planning was also evident across more of the candidates' papers compared to the previous series. Those who plan often find that they are able to write in more detail and with greater understanding than those who do not give the content and direction of the writing much thought before they begin. Structure and sequence is also

key to success. Many candidates used the planning page not only to plan their writing but to give an indication of sequence. Quite often, candidates who did not plan or consider sequence, produced writing that was disjointed or aimless in direction and undeveloped.

## Task 2

To complete the second task, candidates were required to write a letter to their Headteacher or Principal giving their views on a proposed ban of all mobile phones and social media use for students whilst in school/college. This task was an argumentation task and candidates were required to give their views about the proposal. Candidates could use information from the reading materials, but few chose to do so as personal viewpoint and personal knowledge of the school proved to be far more pertinent.

Most recognised that this was a formal letter and that it required a formal format. The majority included addresses at the top of the letter, although some did not manage to sequence these accurately. There was a good deal of discussion at CPD sessions this year about the requirement for an address at the top of a letter. This was also something we discussed at the examiner training conference. As stated at the CPD sessions, candidates are not penalised if they do not include an address. However, an accurate address/format may enhance the overall quality of the writing when deciding upon the overall mark for 'Communicating and Organising'. Salutations are also an important part of letter writing. Candidates should be able to spell and punctuate these correctly. It is one of the few things that they can revise in advance of their English examination. Some candidates confused their greetings, but most adopted a formal style/tone.

Structure and sequence in writing is also key to success. Many candidates used the planning page to plan their writing and many plans included an indication of sequence. Those who chose not to plan, in most cases, were not helped by their decision. Quite often, candidates who did not plan, produced writing that was either disjointed or aimless in direction and undeveloped.

Interesting and engaging content is also imperative. Many candidates had a clear view about the proposal and whether it would be appropriate to introduce it in their school, which was pleasing. Some decided to split the task into two distinct sections and deliberated banning social media use, for example, but not mobile phones. This was a slightly different approach to those who tried to produce a piece of writing which equally covered both side of the debate and ended up being less argumentative than it ought to have been. Those who tried to include information to support both sides of the argument were usually less successful if they did not reach a clear decision.

Across the ability range, candidates found plenty of different issues to write about. Many felt that banning phones would be detrimental to their well-being and safety. Candidates gave a wealth of reasons and anecdotes to support this view point, although those who felt that phones improve communication and socialising in school were usually less convincing. Many candidates commented on mental health and stability being associated with mobile phones and a significant number felt that they ought to be banned in school due to their role in cyber bullying. Overall, few candidates struggled to find something to write about for this task and those who produced brief writing often did so as a result of poor timing.

As always, technical accuracy remains a concern across both writing tasks. Some candidates struggled to punctuate their letters from the very beginning with some strangely placed commas in their salutations. Some managed to write entire paragraphs with only a full stop at the end and comma splicing continues to be a common feature. Inappropriate use of semicolons is a concern and it is advisable that only candidates who are able to use these accurately should be encouraged to do so. Some candidates included a tick list of different

types of punctuation, on their planning page, which they then tried to shoehorn into their writing. It is far better for candidates to simply write naturally than to force a punctuation range where it does not fit. The usual spelling errors were evident across many papers and basic homophone errors with words such as there and their, where and were, were not uncommon. It is also disappointing when candidates do not manage to spell words correctly that they have been given in the task (for example principal, college and views).

The following are still common issues associated with less successful writing:

- Basic errors, which impact on meaning
- Loss of focus on the task
- Unselective copying from the resource materials
- Disjointed arguments (where candidates jump erratically from one idea to the next)
- Brief and undeveloped writing
- Lengthy writing which loses all control and meaning



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