The New English A Levels 2015
A Guide to the Specs

Ian Cushing, Marcello Giovanelli and Gary Snapper summarise the changes at A Level from September 2015 and explore the features of each of the new specs in all three A Level English subjects.

The whole set of new A Level specifications were not finally accredited by Ofqual until just before Christmas, to everyone’s frustration. The lateness of the accreditation, the complexity of the choices to be made between specs, and the ongoing dilemma which centres face in deciding what to do about teaching AS Level, mean that many departments have still not decided which A Level specifications to teach in September. We hope that this guide, in which we attempt to outline the current versions.

The New English A Levels 2015

As Level English Literature – Co-teachability

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3 aspects in equal measures (although clearly students who do not consider form and structure as well as language will continue to be disadvantaged!

In the objective concerned with interpretation (now AO5), note that the phrase ‘interpretations of other readers’ has been replaced by ‘different interpretations’, which clarifies the intention of this objective significantly. Whilst this allows teachers and students to focus valuably on personal responses to ambiguity and interpretative variety in class discussion, it will of course still be important for students to explore ideas from published literary criticism and theory in parts of the course; some specs (AQA B, Edexcel) have built this into their specs using critical anthropologies.

Co-teachability

Many centres will be very concerned about the co-teachability of A Level and the new stand-alone AS Level. This is a complex issue. All A Level specs are required to be co-teachable with AS, but, in Literature, even where the content overlaps with A Level, the AS exams will be different in configuration from the A Level exams and so cannot simply act as a ‘mock’ for the A Level.

The most difficult issue is that, in 3 of the 5 specs (AQA B, OCR and WJEC), the AS exam requires students to answer on 1 (OCR, AQA B) or 2 (WJEC) set texts which are not needed for the A Level exam. In each case, however, these extra set texts could be used as wider reading for coursework, if this is planned carefully into the course.

Another issue is that, in 4 of the 5 specs (AQA A, AQA B, OCR and WJEC), the AS exam requires students to answer on 1 (AQA A, AQA B or 2 (WJEC, OCR) set texts which, in each case, would be paired with an additional, non-AS, text in the A Level exam. This is likely to mean that departments will need to teach one of each pair of texts for AS and the other one later for A Level, rather than together at the same time. Although at first this might seem awkward, some might feel that this in fact is not a bad way to structure a 2-year linear course in such a way that students build their knowledge of each topic incrementally, returning in Year 13 to material studied originally in Year 12.

The only spec not to pose either of these problems is Edexcel’s, in which the content and configuration of the AS matches that of the A Level more closely.

Technical issues

Although departments will need to focus on the core content of each spec in making decisions, it is perhaps also worth pointing out some issues to do with technical features of the specs.

Weighting and distribution of assessment objectives

In 3 of the 5 specs, assessment objectives have been distributed in various different combinations around the different questions and papers, depending on the particular emphases of each part of the course, much in the manner of the current specs. However, it’s worth noting that, in both its specs, have taken the bold decision to get rid of this particular numbers game by deciding that the weighting and distribution of the As will always be the same in every question or task on the spec. Thus all five AOs will always be tested, and always at the same weighting (AO1 28%, AO2 24%, AO3 24%, AO4 24%).

Whilst arguably AO6 approach places considerable demands on students, it also means that no-one ever has to worry about which AO they should be attending to at any particular moment. It also signifies that, in these specs, knowledge about language, context and interpretation are envisaged as constant and integral aspects of learning about literature.

Closed and open book

Some (like me) will never have been able to see the point of closed book examinations; others will swear that it is the only way. Accordingly, the specs offer a number of different options here. Edexcel offers only open book papers, whilst OCR, as it is wont, offers only closed book papers. The other 3 specs offer a combination of Shakespeare (which appears in the exam rather than
coursework in all specs) is closed book in all specs apart from 2 texts.

Length and number of papers and examined set texts:

Some specs offer 2 exam papers (OCR, AQA), some 3 (Edexcel, WJEC). The total number of hours examined varies from 5 (OCR) to 6 (WJEC), with the others offering 8. OCR is the only board to set only 5 texts for the exam and 3 for coursework, instead of 6 for the exam and 2 for coursework. Hour-for-hour, OCR and WJEC are arguably the most generous in examined hours set against number of texts. Again, departments will have different views about these elements: in any case, these factors will certainly need to be evaluated in the context of the overall structure and content of each spec.

Balance of genre:

Finally, of the 8 texts, 3 specs (AQA A and B, Edexcel) have opted for 2 poetry, 2 prose and 2 drama, with a free choice for the other. WJEC offers 3 poetry, 3 drama and 2 prose. OCR offers 2 poetry, 2 drama and 3 prose.

Coursework tasks:

All the specs have allowed free choice of texts for the coursework element, albeit with some stipulations about genre and period, and all require somewhere in the 2500-1500 word range in total. 3 of the specs (AQA A, Edexcel and WJEC) require just 1 task – a comparative essay based on 2 texts. The other 2 ask for 2 tasks. AQA B incorporates its characteristic focus on Crime Writing on literary theory into both of its tasks, each on a different text; one task is allowed to be a piece of re-creative work. OCR offers a comparative essay on 2 texts, and either re-creative writing or close reading on the third. Again, departments will evaluate these options differently, some opting for the clarity of 1 comparative task, others going for the variety of the other options (and perhaps also the benefit of being able to split the coursework between 2 teachers, with each teacher taking responsibility for 1 of 2 tasks.)

Unseens:

There is considerable variety of approach to the unseens in each spec. In general, a traditional approach to the unseen – a single passage or poem plucked from the literary universe with no relation to any pre-studied text, theme or period – has been rejected.

There is considerable variety of approach to the unseens in each spec. Some specs offer 1 task on 1 unseen text only (OCR A, B, Edexcel, OCR), others 2 tasks covering 2 unseen texts (WJEC) or 3 unseen texts (AQA A). Some offer tasks requiring comment on an unseen text only (OCR A Paper 2, AQA B OCR, WJEC), whilst others require comparison between 2 texts – either 2 unseen texts (AQA A Paper 1) or 1 unseen text and 1 text set (Edexcel). Some specs offer prose unseen only (OCR), some poetry unseen only (Edexcel), some both prose and poetry (AQA A Paper 2, WJEC), and some leave the genre open (AQA B). The total marks riding on response to unseen texts might also be noted: 13.3% (AQA B), 18% (Edexcel), 20% (OCR), WJEC, 26.7% (AQA A).

In general, a traditional approach to the unseen – a single passage or poem plucked from the literary universe with no relation to any pre-studied text, theme or period – has been rejected, with only WJEC offering that task as one of its 2 unseen questions. In all the other tasks, the unseen passage has been placed in some kind of pre-studied context. This, of course, enables students to anchor their responses in a particular way that might be reassuring for all concerned, but it also arguably shifts the focus to some extent from the close reading skills that unseens are perhaps most useful for developing. Departments will need to weigh up the various approaches carefully.

Structure and content of spec:

In addition to the above, departments will of course want to consider the way in which the subject is configured in each specification. All the specs are well constructed and offer interesting choices of topic and text. As in the 2008 specs, there are considerable differences here, though, with the 2 AQA specs in particular taking a strongly contextual approach focusing on theme and period (AQA A) or on genre and theory (AQA B). WJEC and OCR offer a clear division into units on poetry, prose and drama, whilst OCR has a different but similarly clear division – pre-1900, post-1900 and cross-period study.

AQA A:

This spec, as previously, offers a wide range of interesting and popular texts set within appealing approaches (Love through the Ages, World War One and its aftermath, Modern Times 1945 to the present) – and considerable continuity from the current spec.

AQA B:

Again, this spec offers continuity from the current spec (Tragedy/Comedy, Theory), continuing its bold approach to genre and representation. Particularly interesting is the introduction of Crime Writing on literary theory, note that these DO NOT focus on the modern genres of crime and political fiction but range widely in prose, poetry and drama, focusing on the representation of crime and politics in literature from Hamlet to The Kite Runner.

Edexcel:

With its open book ethos and its clarity of structure (drama, poetry, prose, coursework), Edexcel’s spec is full of interest, from the appealing texts throughout and the topics offered in the prose papers to the clear focus on post-2000 poetry in Section A of the poetry paper, and the critical anthology that accompanies the Shakespeare study.

OCR:

The traditionally more conservative approach of OCR is reflected in the structure and closed book ethos of this spec, which will appeal to many. There are many attractive text choices, a particularly appealing choice of texts and topics in Paper 2, and – to be particularly applauded – the opportunity to do re-creative writing for coursework (otherwise only offered by AQA B).

WJEC Eduqas:

WJEC offers much continuity with its current spec, and, like Edexcel, a clear vision of genre-based study. There are some great text choices, and an interesting unseen approach which sets the unseen in the context of a narrow time period – either 1880-1910 or 1918-1939.

NB: A more detailed version of the A Level Literature comparison chart, including the set texts, is available to download on the NATE website.

Gary Snapper
NATE Post-16 Higher Education Committee
A Level English Language

The new A Level specifications in English Language aim to build on the on-going popularity of the subject at post-16 by offering teacher and students a varied diet of text-based analysis, engagement with issues and concepts related to language study and opportunities for independent research and writing tasks. The good news is that much of what made the subject popular on legacy specifications has been retained and awarding bodies have thought carefully about the demands that reform across all key stages will have on schools and colleges. However, there have also been some interesting additions to content and new and innovative ways of assessing skills and knowledge.

AQA

AQA has historically had the lion’s share of the market with the current specifications having 80% of candidates and specification B alone having 67% based on last year’s entries. The big headline then is the fact that AQA is now to offer a single specification. Given that A and B specifications had distinctive identities and local followings, existing AQA schools and colleges will want to look carefully to see which aspects of their current specification have been retained.

Although it might be expected that more elements of specification B be present, the new AQA specification blends parts of A and B into what looks like a cogent and balanced course. The specification's restrictions that were evident in legacy specifications such as the requirement to undertake investigative coursework on spoken language only on specification A and no requirement to study accents and dialects on specification B have disappeared and there is a better balance between exploring data and extensive expository writing. For example, the language development question on Paper 1 now requires students to write in response to a statement about children’s lanugage acquisition, which is very welcome indeed. It’s also worth noting that the non-exam assessment is very close to how it was on last year’s entries. The big headline then is the fact that AQA is now to offer a single specification. Given that A and B specifications had distinctive identities and local followings, existing AQA schools and colleges will want to look carefully to see which aspects of their current specification have been retained.

The content of Papers 1 and 2 is straightforward, covering established and popular areas of study. Both papers ask students to undertake a more data-driven analysis of unseen material than on AQA’s specification, and the scope is limited in some cases (the construction of identity on Paper 1 and 8 years for child language on Paper 2), but broader in others (the language change topic asks students to explore temporal variation from 1550 onwards).

The stand-out feature of this specification, which teachers are bound either to love or hate, is Paper 3, which, unlike any of the other awarding bodies’ specifications, shifts the personal investigation into an examination unit. In preparation for this paper, students carry out research based on a pre-released focus that on year on year will fit inside a broader topic in language study. Their research should explore the development of ideas, and attitudes to and variation within the area of study. Specific advice about what to research as well as a list of print and web-based resources will be offered at the same time as the pre-release sub-topics are made available to schools and colleges. It will be interesting to see how this is received. The sub-topics in the specimen materials look engaging – for example, the gender one is on how texts construct versions of the ‘ideal woman’ – and the resources suggested are good. However, it remains to be seen what teachers and students will think of the fact that research findings cannot be taken into the examination. Equally, the one sub-topic per paper constraint might not appeal to those who feel students should have more ownership over what they want to study.

OCR

OCR currently has the smallest share of the A Level English language market with just over 400 candidates per year, but still retains its distinctive identity. OCR’s specification looks relatively conservative: textual analysis, child language acquisition, language change, language in the media, focussing on language and power, gender and language and technology, and a personal investigation, and some original writing. Indeed, this specification might to some look remarkably similar to the current AQA specification B in terms of topics, organisation and question types. OCR have also kept their one specification – and I think a very welcome innovation to post-16 study – is the production of an academic poster, linked to the personal investigation. The poster is not related to the candidate’s exam performance and the task is to write a poster for 40 minutes on one topic of their choice. The expectation is that this will ensure that candidates are able to demonstrate their understanding of the topic, be able to write about it and apply specific knowledge and skills to a new and independent area of study.

The WJEC/Eduqas specification is the only one that not only offers an examination component (Paper 3), here in the form of two separate examination papers, but also an extended investigative coursework. On the WJEC specifications, shifts the personal investigation into an examination unit, and the students will have to make an extended investigation in a unique way. It is similar to Edexcel’s investigation in that areas for study are prescribed, but the WJEC specification also handles the personal investigation in a unique way. It is similar to Edexcel’s investigation in that areas for study are prescribed, but the WJEC and OCR versions, this forms part of the non-exam assessment.

Overall, the OCR, WJEC specifications each have their strengths and weaknesses, and it is up to teachers to decide which one will suit their students the best. The AQA specification is the only one that offers an examination component (Paper 3), here in the form of two separate examination papers, but also an extended investigative coursework.

Assessment Objectives

The assessment objectives for a Level English Language have been reconfigured and there are now five AO’s spread in various combinations across individual components. AO1 can only be tested in conjunction with another AO in the same question or across linked questions. AO1: Apply appropriate methods of language analysis, using associated terminology and coherent written explanations.

AO2: Demonstrate critical understanding of concepts and issues relevant to language use.

AO3: Analyse and evaluate how contextual factors and language features are associated with the construction of meaning.

AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic concepts and methods.

AO5: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways.

AQA A

Language and the Individual and Society (50%)

Text variation and representation

Edexcel

Language, Context and Identity (60%)

Local and Global context

Language and identity

OCR

Exploring Language (50%)

Language in context

Comparing texts

WJEC

Eduqas

Analysis of Texts in Context (50%)

Spoken language

Written language

Using Language (50%)

Investigating data

Original writing

WJEC Eduqas

The WJEC Eduqas specification has similar content and focuses on Papers 1 and 2 to other awarding bodies (text analysis, examination language and issues language change). However, schools and colleges might be attracted to two particular elements: the exclusive focus on spoken language on the first part of Paper 1, and what looks like a very interesting ‘Twenty-first century English’ topic on Paper 2. For the latter, students draw on issues, theories and concepts from the familiar topic of ‘language and technology’ and explore user variation, and the influences of technological advancements as meaning-making resources in spontaneous contexts of use since the turn of the century. Clearly, there is a great deal here that will interest students, and new research findings are appearing all the time which will ensure that this component remains fresh and contemporary.

The WJEC Eduqas specification is the only specification on offer that places original writing on an examination component (Paper 3), here in the form of two separate examination papers, together with a commentary on one piece. The specification also handles the personal investigation in a unique way. It is similar to Edexcel’s investigation in that areas for study are prescribed, but like the AQA and OCR versions, this forms part of the non-exam assessment.

For non-exam assessment, the distribution is given below. AQA, OCR and WJEC have similar distributions across different questions for examinations but on any one question there is no AO that dominates. This isn’t the case for OCR, where there is additional weighting on AO3 on Paper 1 and AO2 on Paper 2 to match the content and demands of each of those papers. Equally, on the WJEC specification, there are some slightly different weightings of AOs on Papers 2 and 3.

To avoid repetition, the examiners for OCR and WJEC have set their aims for the exam topic together with new AO requirements. Despite what appears to be some restriction in choice on Paper 1 (‘Language Issues’) and the NEA, it is worth noting that students will need to study all of the papers and that the suggested focuses for NEA do still offer a wide range of potential investigation projects.

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Using Language (50%)

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Overall, the WJEC Eduqas specification has some interesting settings points but teachers may not find the requirement to complete original writing in examination conditions appealing. Despite what appears to be some restriction in choice on Paper 1 (‘Language Issues’) and the NEA, it is worth noting that students will need to study all of the papers and that the suggested focuses for NEA do still offer a wide range of potential investigation projects.
A Level Language

Exam Papers

1. Language, the Individual and Society (40%)
   - 2 hours 30 mins
   - Text variations and representation
   - Close analysis of representation and meaning in a text and comparison with another text

2. Child Language development (0-11 years)
   - Essay in response to a statement about children's language development with some data as a stimulus

3. Texts of the same genre
   - Comparative analysis of how two texts vary and the impact of these variations on the identity of the text

Language in Action (20%)
- Language investigation (2000-2500 words excluding data)
- Personal investigation on a language topic
- Original writing and commentary (750 words each)
- Original writing on either 'the power of persuasion', 'the power of storytelling' or 'the power of information'

Non-exam assessment

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Edexcel

1. Language Variation (38%)
   - 2 hours 15 mins
   - Individual variation
   - Comparative analysis of how language use in 2 texts reflects and constructs the identity of the user

2. Child Language (20%)
   - 1 hour
   - Spoken language acquisition and the development of writing skills (5-6 years)
   - Analysis of some data with a particular focus (e.g. child directed speech)

3. Investigating Language (28%)
   - 2 hours 45 mins
   - Topic area for investigation (one of global English, language and gender, language and journalism, language and power, language and regional variation), studied by pre-release material
   - 2 questions: analysis unseen data on sub-topic theme
   - Discussion of a statement related to sub-topic theme

Crafting Language (20%)
- Original writing and commentary (1500-2000 words for writing: 1000 words for commentary)
- 2 pieces of original writing from a chosen genre
differentiated by function and audience

OCR

1. Exploring Language (40%)
   - 2 hours 30 mins
   - Language under the microscope
   - Analysis of language features of a short text in context

2. Child Language (20%)
   - 1 hour
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Independent Language Research (20%)
- Language Investigation (2000-2500 words)
- Personal investigation on a language topic
- Academic poster (750-2000 words)
- A multimodal poster designed for presentation at an undergraduate conference

WJEC Eduqas

1. Language Concepts and Issues (30%)
   - 2 hours
   - Analysis of spoken language
   - Comparative analysis of 2 spoken language texts

2. Language Change over Time (30%)
   - 2 hours
   - Language change over time (from 1500)
   - Short questions on aspects of lexical, phonological, orthographical, grammatical change and one longer essay question

3. Creative and Critical Use of Language (20%)
   - 2 hours
   - Creative writing
   - 2 pieces of original writing in any genre from stimulus material
   - Commentary on a commentary on 1 of the texts produced

Language Acquisition and the development of writing skills (5-6 years)
- Analysis of some data with a particular focus (e.g. child directed speech)

Language and Identity (20%)
- Language Investigation (2000-2500 words)
- Personal investigation on a language topic from 1 of 4 specified areas

Language and Culture (20%)
- Language Investigation (2000-2500 words)
- Personal investigation on a language topic from 1 of 4 specified areas

AQA

The two AQA legacy specifications (A and B) have consistently held the majority of student numbers, with a total of around 10,000 entries each year. The most obvious change from AQA is that there is now only a single specification on offer. The legacy specifications each had their own separate structures and content, and the new specification is a blend of the two. Existing centres will be interested in which aspects have been retained.

Students are required to study a novel (Frankenstein, Dracula, The Handmaid’s Tale or The Lonely Bones), an additional novel at A Level (into the Wild, The Suspicions of Mr Whicher, The Great Gatsby or The Kite Runner) and an anthology of non-fiction texts (written and spoken) about Paris and a play (Othello, All My Sons, A Streetcar Named Desire, or The Hed). Creative writing in exams is retained, through re-casting a given extract from a set prose text. A welcome new addition is the requirement for a linguistic commentary, in which students must justify their own language choices. The inclusion of poetry as an examined topic will be a new addition to the specification. As before, students are required to study a range of modes along the speech-writing continuum.

As expected, and as retained from the A and B legacy specifications, an emphasis is placed on linguistic elements of literary texts. Exam questions focus on the presentation and construction of people, events, locations, time and memories, with specific references to how language is used to do so. There are 2 exams totaling 5.5 hours, covering 6 different sections. Paper 1 is an open book exam, and although an extract is given, students are required to use this as a springboard to discuss events throughout the rest of the novel. Paper 2 is also open book and follows a similar extract-whole novel question format.

The non-exam assessment is an analytical investigation, removing any requirement for creative writing from the legacy specifications. Students are required to draw comparisons between literary and non-literary texts, which builds sensibly on the content and skills for the examined units.

Edexcel

Edexcel has enjoyed a consistent number of students taking the specification since its inception, with over 3,000 students taking the course each year.

Students are required to produce re-creative writing based on non-fiction anthology texts and a novel compared to another novel, drama or poetry, based on a theme (Society and the Individual, Love and Loss, Encounters or Crossing Boundaries). The range of texts on offer here is substantial and covers a wide range of styles, voices and cultures. The possibilities of comparing a novel with another prose fiction text in such detail is unique to this specification and will no doubt yield some interesting approaches. Students are also required to study a drama text (All My Sons, A Streetcar Named Desire, Elmina’s Echoes, The History Boys, Top Girls or Translation).

The exam questions focus on elements such as how writers use language to create a sense of voice, pace, conflict, relationships, perspective, gender and identity. Explicit references to linguistic and literary features, plus knowledge of genre conventions and context are made. There are 2 exams totaling 5 hours, covering 4 different sections. Papers 1 and 2 are open book exams, with a given extract as a starting point to discuss other parts of the text.

“The new Lang & Lit specs provide opportunities for students to study a range of literary styles, texts, genres, and to apply knowledge from linguistic, literary and stylistic schools of thought as well as conduct independent research and create original writing.”
A Level Language and Literature

Exams Papers

**AQA**

- **1. Telling Stories**
  - 1 extract based question on text
  - and one anthology text
- **2. Exploring Conflict**
  - 1 comparative question on unseen extract

**Edexcel**

- **1. Voices in Speech and Writing (40%)**
  - 1 hour, closed book
  - **Non-fiction and spoken texts**
  - 1 question comparing 2 texts from anthology
- **2. Varieties in Language and Literature (40%)**
  - 2 hours, open book
  - **Unseen Prose Non-fiction Texts**
  - 1 question on unseen prose text, linked to studied theme
  - **Dramatic Encounters**
  - 1 comparative question prose fiction text and one other text from a theme

**OCR**

- **1. Exploring Non-fiction and Spoken Texts (46%)**
  - 1 hour, closed book
  - **Non-fiction and spoken texts**
  - 1 question comparing 2 texts from anthology
- **2. The Language of Poetry and Plays (32%)**
  - 2 hours, closed book
  - **Poetry and stylistic analysis**
  - 1 question comparing 2 or 3 anthology poems
  - **Plays: dramatic and contextual analysis**
  - 1 question on set play (32 marks)
- **3. Reading as a Writer, Writing as a Reader (32%)**
  - 2 hours, open book
  - **Reading as a writer**
  - 1 question from a choice of 2, based on set text
  - **Writing as a reader**
  - 1 creative writing question from a choice of 2, with commentary on writing

**WJEC**

- **1. Poetry and Prose (30%)**
  - 2 hours, open book
  - **Poetry**
  - 1 comparative question from 2 choices, on anthology and unseen text
  - **Prose**
  - 2 pieces in 2 parts, from 2 choices, on set text
- **2. Drama (30%)**
  - 7 hours, closed book
  - **Shakespeare**
  - 1 compulsory question, from a choice of 2, based on text
  - **Other Drama**
  - 1 question on 2 choices, from set text
- **3. Non-literary Texts (20%)**
  - 2 hours, closed book
  - **Comparative Analysis**
  - 1 comparative question on 3 unseen spoken non-literary texts
  - **Non-literary Texts**
  - 1 question in 2 parts, based on non-literary set text

Making Connections (20%)

- **Investigating exploring a specific technique or theme in literary and non-literary discourse, 2500 – 3000 words**

Investigating & Creating Texts (20%)

- **2 pieces of original writing (1 fiction, 1 non-fiction, 1500 – 2000 words)**
- **1 analytical commentary**
  - reflecting on the studied texts and student writing
  - 1000 – 1250 words

Analysing & Producing Texts (20%)

- **Analytical comparative essay**
  - from a list of 12 non-fiction texts and a second free choice (one text must be post-2000)
  - 1500 – 2000 words
- **1 piece of original non-fiction writing**
  - 1000 – 1200 words, with 150-word intro

Critical & Creative Genre Study (20%)

- **Genre study**
  - (critical study of a prose genre, from prescribed list)
  - 1500 – 2000 words
- **Related creative writing**
  - 2 pieces of writing
  - 1 literary, 1 non-literary
  - 1000 – 1500 words

The non-exam assessment places a heavy emphasis on creative writing. Students are required to produce two pieces of writing, one fictional and one non-fictional, based on their own choice. One analytical commentary, reflecting on the writing process, is also required. The freedom and breadth of opportunities for this component will be appealing to teachers and students.

OCR

OCR currently has the smallest share of the market, with an average of 800 students taking the specification each year. The new specification has been developed in partnership with the English and Media Centre, known for their popular range of publications, courses and resources for all GCSE and A Level English courses. This is an exciting new course with many developments from the legacy specification.

Students are required to study non-fiction written and spoken texts – OCR fulfils this in part through its varied anthology. Students are also expected to produce non-fiction texts (for different purposes) and linguistic commentaries, read a novel (Jane Eyre, The Great Gatsby, Things Fall Apart, The God of Small Things, Atonement or The Nameless), an anthology of poems from one poet (William Blake, Emily Dickinson, Seamus Heaney, Esamul Boland, Carol Ann Duffy or Jacob Sam-La Rose). At A Level there is the requirement to study a play (Othello, The Importance of Being Earnest, A Streetcar Named Desire, Descent into Chaos, Our Country's Good or Jerusalem). The list of set texts is bold and adventurous, offering the opportunity to study a wide range of styles, cultures and voices.

In exam questions, the importance of language in constructing meaning is made explicit throughout, as is the influence and importance of context. A significant feature of the specification is the relationship between reading and writing both in the AS and the A Level examination where creative writing opportunities are linked to reading. There are 3 exams totaling 5 hours, covering 6 different sections. Paper 2 is a closed book exam, Paper 3 is open book.

As in the legacy specification, the non-exam assessment requires both comparative analytical and creative writing. A prescribed list of texts (covering a wide range of styles and forms) is given for the analytical section, and students must choose their own text for comparison. The specification encourages adventurous choices and more unusual text types such as graphic novels and screenplays.

**WJEC Edusqa**

WJEC Edusqa has grown in popularity over the years, with student numbers now around the 3000 mark. This is a diverse and comprehensive specification, with 3 exams at A Level, like OCR.

Students are required to study a poetry anthology, comparing a poem to a fictional or non-fictional text – an integral bridge between literary genres. The creative writing opportunities look innovative, and linguistic commentaries are required, including a comparative element. Students are required to study a play (Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf, The History Boys, Translations, Kindertortura or Cat on a Hot Tin Roof) and a non-literary prose text (Once in a House on Fire).

Cold Blood, Skating to Antarctica, A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius (or Homage to Catalonia). WJEC Edusqa make Shakespeare compulsory (Antony and Cleopatra, King Lear, Much Ado About Nothing, Othello or The Tempest), and the comparison of spoken non-literary texts is also required.

Exam questions are detailed, focusing on elements such as the construction of place, life and death, thoughts and feelings, character, events, occupations and relationships. Specific references to the integration of literary and linguistic approaches are prevalent, as is the significance and influence of contextual factors. There are 3 exams totaling 6 hours (the longest time given across the 4 specifications), covering 6 different sections.

The non-exam assessment requires both analytical and creative writing. Students must choose a prose genre (Gothic, Science Fiction, Romance, Dysphoria, Crime, Satire, Comedy, Historical Fiction, War, Conflict, Adventure, Journeys, Life-writing, Journalism, Travel or Identity/The Outsider) and conduct a critical study of a set text and wider reading. The list of set texts is lengthy and represents a varied scope of fiction and non-fiction prose. In addition, students must produce two pieces of creative writing informed by their choice of literary genre. Paper 1 is an open book exam. For Section B (Prose), the question is split into two, one focusing on an extract, the other referring to the novel as a whole. Paper 2 Section A is closed book, with the same two question format: a given extract and the novel as a whole. Section B is also closed book, with non-given extract. Paper 3 is closed book but based on a given extract and no requirements to refer to the novel as a whole.

**Assessment Objectives**

The assessment objectives for English Language and Literature are as follows:

**AO1: Apply concepts and methods from integrated linguistic and literary study as appropriate, using associated terminology and coherent written expression**

**AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in texts**

**AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are produced and received**

**AO4: Explore connections across texts, informed by linguistic and literary concepts and methods**

**AO5: Demonstrate expertise and creativity in the use of English to communicate in different ways**

There are now 5 assessment objectives (previously there were 4), with slight changes in wording. The overall simplification and brevity is welcome. The reference to structure and form in the legacy specifications (AO2) has been removed, though this is obviously an important aspect of language and literature and features throughout all the specifications. The separation of the legacy AO3 into the new AO3 and AO4 is another welcome change, placing more emphasis on connections and comparisons across texts.

Figure 1 shows the weightings of each assessment objective across the different specifications, at A Level (where the x-axis represents percentage).
**Feature: The New English A Levels 2015**

**AS Level and co-teachability**

All of the specifications have been designed with co-teachability in mind, with obvious structural choices made to help teachers and students out where possible. The AS Level is structured as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AQA A</th>
<th>Edexcel</th>
<th>OCR</th>
<th>WJEC Eduqas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper One</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paper Two</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paper One</strong></td>
<td><strong>Paper Two</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Views and Voices</td>
<td>People and Places</td>
<td>Views and Voices</td>
<td>People and Places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Imagined worlds</td>
<td>• Remembered places</td>
<td>• Imagined worlds</td>
<td>• Remembered places</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poetic voices</td>
<td>• Re-creative writing; commentary</td>
<td>• Poetic voices</td>
<td>• Re-creative writing; commentary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voices in Speech and Writing</td>
<td>Varieties in Language and Literature</td>
<td>Voices in Speech and Writing</td>
<td>Varieties in Language and Literature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creation of voice</td>
<td>• Prose fiction extract</td>
<td>• Creation of voice</td>
<td>• Exploring text and theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparing voices</td>
<td>• Exploring text and theme</td>
<td>• Comparing voices</td>
<td>• Exploring text and theme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-fiction Written and Spoken Texts</td>
<td>The Language of Literary Texts</td>
<td>Non-fiction Written and Spoken Texts</td>
<td>The Language of Literary Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Reading spoken and written non-fiction</td>
<td>• The language of prose</td>
<td>• Reading spoken and written non-fiction</td>
<td>• The language of prose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Writing non-fiction</td>
<td>• The language of poetry</td>
<td>• Writing non-fiction</td>
<td>• The language of poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparative Analysis and Creative Writing</td>
<td>Drama and non-Literary Texts</td>
<td>Comparative Analysis and Creative Writing</td>
<td>Drama and non-Literary Texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Comparative analysis of poetry and unseen text</td>
<td>• Post-1900 drama</td>
<td>• Comparative analysis of poetry and unseen text</td>
<td>• Post-1900 drama</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Creative writing; commentary</td>
<td>• Non-literal text</td>
<td>• Creative writing; commentary</td>
<td>• Non-literal text</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the AS specifications require study of a novel, non-fiction written and spoken texts and creative writing. Edexcel is the only specification that does not include poetry as a compulsory unit. WJEC Eduqas is the only specification that makes a play a compulsory unit.

**Final thoughts**

The new specifications provide a well-rounded scheme of content for the study of language and literature. Schools and colleges will of course need to take their own personal circumstances and preferences into account. To me, the opportunity to try something new and to develop or adapt existing resources and schemes of work is an exciting one. There is a huge variety of texts on offer to study, and teachers will no doubt have much to think about in which ones they decide to follow. Similarly, students will enjoy the range of texts on offer, and are highly likely to be exposed to genres and styles not previously encountered. This can only be a move in the right direction.

“Students will enjoy the range of texts on offer, and are highly likely to be exposed to genres and styles not previously encountered.”

Each specification provides an adequate prerequisite for students wishing to pursue a range of English related degrees in HE. A (celebratory) shift towards contextualised grammar teaching, stylistics and the ‘language of literature’ at KS2, KS3 and KS4 should provide a good platform for this A Level. However, after a steady rise in student numbers between 2003 – 2009, uptake is now on the decline and more work needs to be done in ‘selling’ this important and rewarding A Level to schools, colleges and students.

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