



## **Examining Creativity within England's GCSE English Language exams: to what extent do the exams and their questions limit or enable creativity?**

### **Introduction**

In England, GCSEs form a fundamental part of the compulsory pre-16 education. However, recent concerns have been raised over the current state of England's exam system, with critics going as far to say that the current reforms 'stifle' creativity (Mason, 2013), and that the system's 'ritualised focus' on excelling in exams compromises students' creativity (Furness, 2014). This interdisciplinary report - which has chosen to focus on the specifications of GCSE English Language in particular given that they are a compulsory subject for school leavers as part of the Key Stage 4 National Curriculum - aims to explore these concerns and test their validity. Using a threefold approach, with data obtained from exam question papers, mark schemes, and teachers of the English Language GCSE specification, it starts by reviewing the current place of creativity within the exams. It then proceeds by analysing - on a linguistic and contextual level - the scope that these exams allow for creativity and discusses how their marking criteria compensate for the inclusion of creative responses, referring to solid data to inform the analyses. The study concludes by providing a snapshot of the current place of creativity within these types of exams, including the implications of this specific study on creativity as an academic discipline and within education in general, and suggestions for any potential areas for improvement.

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## **Literature Review**

In its first part, this literature review aims to further demonstrate the current problem with creativity within England's GCSE exams more generally. To date, there has been little academic investigation into how England's GCSE English Language exams, specifically, incorporate creativity, which makes any report that theoretically investigates this field difficult. For this reason, this review focuses mainly on the criticism and publications about the exams system in general and how it might limit creativity, in the hope that these will provide a point of entry for my study, which will go on to specifically address the concerns with evidence.

In their research report on developing new forms of assessing creativity, Spencer et al. (2012, p. 20) highlight how creativity is undervalued in England's education system today, citing the 'performativity culture prevalent at Key Stage 4' as one of the reasons. This provides us with a springboard for addressing the concerns mentioned previously in the introduction. Referring to Menter (2010, cited in Spencer et al. 2012, p. 19), they imply the existence of a dichotomy between creativity and performance; despite the fact that both of these are 'recognised through policy as important', there is 'an overriding agenda of performativity' which 'competes with creativity'. For the purposes of this study, it is implied that there is an overemphasis on doing well, as opposed to producing work that is creative.

In line with the above report, articles in the media express a similar sentiment that the overall GCSE exam system focuses too much on producing results (i.e. a performativity culture), and the general consensus is that this, in turn, limits creativity. Hasan (2011) asserts that a 'culture of relentless exams' has been created in Britain, which, consequently, results in a system that offers no 'reward'

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for students' creativity. Hasan even goes as far to say that England's exam system is not 'fit for purpose', and that it does not 'truly measure' creative thinking. In addition, Gardner (2013), in his article, quotes children's author Sally Gardner as criticising the (then) new national curriculum for 'stifling creativity in the classroom', thus leaving pupils with a 'diet of exams, exams, exams'. Little takes a similar stance, asserting that the exams system '[makes] no allowance for lateral thinking, for creative extension, or wit', implying that the reason for this comes from the limiting nature of mark schemes and the need for students to hit 'trigger words' in order to obtain a good mark (Little, quoted in Clark, 2009). This is something that will be dealt with later on in the study.

Of course, whilst these findings allows us to understand the general concerns surrounding the current system and how these impact on creativity, they have little use in providing us with any concrete data for reference. In both reports, when evidence is cited, it is done so in the form of quotations from influential figures in the field of England's exam systems; there are no specific case studies or exam-related data provided or analysed. Similarly, both Hasan and Gardner talk of the GCSE exam system in abstract terms; they do not refer specifically to a certain qualification or any parts of the qualification – be those in the specification, assessment objectives, or the assessment themselves – that lead to them to holding the view that creativity in England's exam system is limited. This gap is where my pilot study fits in. As it takes the form of an analytical report, my study can concretely address the aforementioned concerns and explore how creativity is directly contained within the exam system, referring specifically to materials provided by exam boards of a specific qualification, and feedback from teachers themselves.

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The second part of this literature review focuses on the how the current system works, and discusses the rationale behind it. In line with the most-recent scheme of assessment, from 2015 the GCSE English Language exams will change to incorporate a linear format with all exams being sat at the end of a 2-year teaching period. My study focuses on these new 2015 qualifications, as these are the most up-to-date specifications that exist. For English Language, two equally-weighted 50% exams make up the whole weighted assessment for the qualification: one exam that deals with reading and creative writing, and another that deals with communicating information and ideas. Both of these components consist of a reading section and a writing section.

The GCSE English Language specifications have their roots in the National Curriculum (hereafter NC) for English, which is set out by the government agency Ofqual, the qualifications regulator. They outline what Assessment Objectives (hereafter AOs) the exam boards should use to design the specifications and the exams, before being approving them for GCSE-level examination. The NC in English (an adapted copy of which is provided as Appendix A) generally aims to equip students with a high standard of English, with which they can communicate competently and effectively, and these are reflected by the AOs (which are included in Appendix B). The AOs thus function as the means through which the exam content can be prescribed. Through answering the exam questions, students demonstrate that they have met the assessment objectives of the specification, and, more broadly, the objectives of the NC as set by the Department for Education. In addition, the marking criteria that are used to grade the responses are based upon these AOs.



The rationale behind the English Language GCSEs can be split into two strands, basing themselves on the NC and the AOs that come from the NC: one for reading, and one for writing. In their responses to reading comprehension, students should demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly, analyse viewpoints and interpret information. In their answers to the writing questions, students should show that they can use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, communicate coherently and cohesively, and also demonstrate presentation skills in a formal setting, i.e. in the exam.

### **Methodology**

In this study, two types of data are used: sample materials taken from the exam boards, and data obtained from informant surveys from teaching staff.

Initially, the exam specification materials and the NC (see appendices A and B) were used to gain an insight into how the current system functioned and how it incorporates creativity. Following this, informant surveys were written and sent to a small sample group of 7 teachers who currently teach English Language at GCSE. 6 of these were returned (see Appendix E). The quantitative data from these surveys was collated and averaged, to allow for an objective evaluation of the data (see figure 1, p. 7). The qualitative data provided an insight into the views of teaching staff on creativity in the exam system, and from this several statements were retrieved and collated (see figure 2, p. 8).

Having already established several key ideas from teaching staff, as well as from the specifications, I conducted my own analysis of the question papers, annotating

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them and making notes of their common features. These findings were tabulated and are displayed in figure 4. The question paper mark schemes were also considered – alongside the question papers – to investigate how they allowed for creative responses, and to allow for consideration of their impact on creativity on an overall level. The figures displayed in the data section are the finalised tables of the data, which were used during the analysis.

In doing the above, it became obvious that the scope of this study only allowed for a detailed analysis of the writing section of both papers, and not the reading section, and so the analysis was narrowed down to include only section B of each paper. The samples used in this study were then given codes, as displayed in figure (p. 9).

Having analysed what the papers had included in their questions, I then went back to the statements retrieved from the informant surveys, and categorised these accordingly, and this complete table is displayed in figure 4 (p. 10). Using all the data together, three concrete areas of analysis were outlined: 1) rubric formation and presentation, 2) question formation and presentation and 3) the use of visual/written stimulus. Although the questionnaire statements also highlighted the mark schemes as an area of analysis, I decided that this type of analysis depended too much on context; without reference to sample responses from students, it is difficult to analyse how the mark schemes and exemplified specifically. So, the mark schemes were to be incorporated on an overall level within the detailed analysis itself, rather than them warranting their own sub-section.

Using these three areas of analysis as a guide, a traditional linguistic analysis was conducted on the exam papers to consider their context, and the use of format, **INNERVATE** Leading student work in English studies, Volume 7 (2014-2015), pp 53-79



modality, categorical statements and linguistic expression in relation to their enabling of creative responses, alongside the mark scheme content.

Each stage of the methodology was dependent on each other, and as a whole it played a crucial role in outlining the areas of analysis, and then in producing the subsequent analysis itself.

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**Data and findings**

**Figure 1: Informant survey findings from rank scale questions**

#	Question	Informant responses						AVG to nearest whole number
		1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	Based on your initial first impressions, to what extent do you believe that the specification <i>assessment objectives</i> <u>enable</u> creativity?	4	5	3	7	3	3	4
2	Based on your initial first impressions, to what extent do you believe that the exam <i>format</i> <u>enables</u> creativity?	2	5	4	5	1	3	3
3	To what extent do you believe that the exam <i>questions</i> – their wording and their scope - <u>enable</u> , creativity?	4	5	5	4	5	5	5
4	To what extent do you believe that the exam <i>mark schemes</i> <u>enable</u> creativity?	4	5	4	5	2	4	4
8	To what extent do you agree with the statement that 'England's exam system stifles creativity' and that its 'ritualised focus on excelling in exams compromises on creativity'?	7	5	8	8	10	6	7





**Figure 2: Table of the key ideas selected from informant open-ended**

KEY IDEAS FROM QUANTATIVE DATA	Group/area for analysis
1. EXAM TIME PRESSURES LIMIT STUDENTS; 2. STUDENTS EXPECTED TO DEMONSTRATE 'ORIGINALITY' AND 'FLAIR' DESPITE A VERY CONSTRICTIVE FRAME OF WRITING AND TIME; 3. THE AUDIENCE IS ALWAYS THE EXAMINER.	Exam format, system / rubric
1. EXAM QUESTIONS ARE FORMULAIC; 2. LACK OF BROAD RANGE OF QUESTIONS IN EXAMS; 3. QUESTIONS PRESCRIPTIVE; 4. ENCOURAGE LIMITED, FORMULAIC RESPONSES; 5. LACK OF CHOICE; 6. LACK OF RELEVANCY TO STUDENTS' OWN LIVES AND 'REAL' AUDIENCES; 7. CREATIVITY ASSESSED ONLY THROUGH IMAGINED SITUATION; 8. EXAM QUESTIONS FOCUS ON REPRODUCTION AND REGURGITATION; 9. OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS MAY PROMOTE CREATIVITY MORE; 10. QUESTIONS FOCUS ON COMPLETING A TASK SET AND NOT ON ENGAGING STUDENTS CREATIVELY; 11. DIFFERENT STUDENTS ARE STIMULATED DIFFERENTLY; 12. BY SPARKING IMAGINATION THROUGH QUESTIONS WITH, CREATIVITY COULD BE MORE EVIDENT.	Question formation / use of visual and written stimuli
1. THE WAY IN WHICH CREATIVITY IS MEASURED IS PROBLEMATIC; 2. KNOWING THE RULES COMES BEFORE CREATIVITY; 3. CREATIVITY IS LIMITED TO FULFILLING OBJECTIVES; 4. CREATIVITY IS LIMITED TO ACCURATE IMPLEMENTATION OF STYLISTIC FEATURES AND STRUCTURES; 5. FOCUS ON INCLUDING 'DRILLED-IN' TECHNIQUES	Application of mark schemes

**responses that informed the analysis**

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**Figure 3: Table to show the labelling system for exam paper and mark scheme sample data referred to in the analysis**

Due to the length of the complete exam papers, these are not included in full as appendices. Rather, only the parts of the question paper referred to in the analysis are included. These are in appendices C-D. Specific sections of these samples are included in the body of the analysis where necessary.

<b>Sample code</b>	<b>Sample type</b>	<b>Sample name (top of sample)</b>	<b>Appendix</b>
E1	AQA Exam paper 1	Page 11 - Section B: Writing (paper 1)	<b>C</b>
E2	AQA Exam paper 2	Page 13 – Section B: Writing (paper 2)	
E3	OCR Exam paper 1	Page 7 – Section B: Writing for audience, impact and purpose	
E4	OCR Exam paper 2	Page 7 – Section B: Writing imaginatively and creatively	
MS1	AQA Mark scheme 1	AQA Mark scheme 1	<b>D</b>
MS2	AQA Mark scheme 2	AQA Mark scheme 2	
MS3	OCR Mark scheme 1	OCR Mark scheme 1	
MS4	OCR Mark scheme 2	OCR Mark scheme 2	



**Figure 4: observations of commonalities between the exam papers**

These commonalities are drawn from samples with codes E1-4.

Section of the paper/group for analysis	Feature	Example (quotation/reference from paper)
Rubric at top of paper	Section name	1. <b>Section name plus skill being assessed:</b> Section B: Writing 2. <b>Section name plus indication of the purpose/why of the writing:</b> Section B: Writing for audience, impact and purpose
	Planning/ checking advice	1. <b>Passive voice, second person:</b> You are advised to plan and check your work carefully; you are reminded of the need to plan your answer
	Time advice/ suggestion	1. <b>Passive voice, second person:</b> You are advised to spend one hour on this section, [...] about 45 minutes on this section 2. <b>Modality, second person:</b> you should leave enough time to check your work at the end.
	Assessment advice (rubric-related)	1. <b>Passive voice formed through auxiliary verb 'will':</b> In this section <u>you will be assessed</u> on the quality of your extended response, these questions <u>are marked</u> with an asterisk (*). 2. <b>Imperative instruction:</b> Write in full sentences.
Question formation	Formulaic inclusion of parameters	1. <b>Imperative instruction with format, audience and purpose specified:</b> <u>Write a speech for your class</u> in which <u>you argue that violence is not the solution to conflict</u> between people.
	Implicit suggestion for inclusion (implication of necessity)	1. <b>Deontic modality expressing necessity (indirect implication) :</b> In your article you <u>should</u> ; <u>you could</u> write about. 2. <b>Bullet points implying a set structure:</b> e.g. [firstly] <u>choose</u> a clear viewpoint; [then] <u>describe</u> the setting etc.

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		3. <b>Prescriptive instructions provided after 'should' is used:</b> explain why peaceful solutions are better than violent ones.
	<b>Question choices</b>	1. Either/or – indirectly stated as opposed to being imperatively stated 2. <b>Imperative:</b> choose, explicitly stated
<b>Written stimuli</b>	<b>Imagined scenarios</b>	1. <b>Imperative:</b> imagine; hypothetical scenario implied 2. <b>Future imagined scenario through simple future:</b> you are <u>going to</u> enter a creative writing competition;
	<b>Viewpoints and topics</b>	1. <b>Prescribed viewpoint:</b> [...] in which you argue that violence is <u>not</u> the answer; explain why peaceful solutions <u>are not</u> better than violent ones; convince your audience that violence <u>does not</u> solve conflict. 2. <b>Prescribed viewpoint:</b> [...] which <u>gives advice to young people on how to cope with the pressures and stresses of modern life</u> 3. <b>Open viewpoint:</b> 'Homework has no value' [...] in which you explain <u>your</u> point of view on this statement. 4. <b>Prescribed topic in creative writing part:</b> weather (in E1), autobiography or ' <i>The Outsider</i> ' title (E2)
<b>Visual stimuli</b>	<b>Picture provided</b>	1. Picture of a train in a storm provided, most likely to be somewhere on the coast.

**Analysis: rubric formation and presentation**



Samples E1 to E4 (see figure 5 below) all contain a global rubric; that is, a set of general instructions that relate to the section of the paper, as opposed to the specific questions. The primary purpose of these rubrics – which are mostly written using deontic modality and the passive voice – is ostensibly to advise students on the overall instructions applicable to that section; the advice, however, is generally prescriptive and condescending, thus potentially limiting creativity (see below). The average score for the question relating to exam format was a 3, indicating that the informants believed that the format itself did not enable creativity to a large extent.

<p><b>Section B: Writing</b></p> <p>You are advised to spend about 45 minutes on this section.          Write in full sentences.          You are reminded of the need to plan your answer.          You should leave enough time to check your work at the end.</p>
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<p>7</p> <p><b>Section B</b></p> <p><b>Writing for audience, impact and purpose</b></p> <p>Choose <b>one</b> of the following writing tasks.</p> <p>You are advised to spend <b>one</b> hour on this section.</p> <p>In this section you will be assessed on the quality of your extended response, these questions are marked with an asterisk (*). You are advised to plan and check your work carefully.</p>
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**Figure 5: rubrics from samples E1-E4.**

In figure 5, the amount of time that candidates should spend on their answers is stated using the passive voice. The almost legalistic use of voice, which is comparable to that often seen on official government document, is impersonal and creates a sense of distance between the candidate and the exam board, placing

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the latter in a higher position of authority. This restricts candidates' autonomy, and their timing/planning.

Firstly, as the candidates are being instructed to do something by a distanced, impersonal voice, this may impede their feeling of freedom, and as such is not conducive to creative or independent thought.

Secondly, the ideological implication (see Wales, 2011: 308) of the instruction – that is, the need to plan/check, and spend a specified amount of time on, the answer – is that it is more of a necessity than some advice, and thus candidates are dissuaded from ignoring the statement. As most candidates will trust the exam board advice and not feel confident in ignoring it – given its source – they will worry more about timing and planning as opposed to producing something creative. Whilst time limits are an unavoidable part of the exam environment, they are, by their nature, restrictive, and therefore not conducive to creative work. In the qualitative data, teaching staff have frequently remarked that the timed conditions of exams make it difficult for students to think creatively and that its 'constrictive' nature does not promote creativity (see responses 1 and 2), thus supporting the overarching paradigm that timed exam conditions limit creativity.

### **Analysis: question formation and presentation**

There is a worrying degree of creative limitation enforced on candidates through the use of formulaic questions. In both questions of sample E3 in figure 6 overleaf, the formulaic constructions provide the candidates with three strict parameters that they must include in their response: the format, the audience, and the purpose, and these offer no room for creative interpretation.



5	Write a speech for your class in which you argue that violence is not the solution to conflict between people.
6	Write an article for a teenage magazine which gives advice to young people on how to cope with the pressures and stresses of modern life. You are not required to include any visual or presentational features.

**Figure 6: E3 questions 5 and 6.**

It is possible to reduce these questions to the following formula:

**'Write' + format of text + audience of text + purpose of text/proposition**

**Figure 7: deduced formula for questions in sample E3.**

These parameters offer a rigid structure within which candidates can work, and whilst they provide guidance to candidates in order for them to produce answers that can be marked objectively, their overly prescriptive nature limits creativity instead of enabling it.

In figure 6, the imperative verb 'write' introduces the task to the candidate, who functions as the understood subject of the phrase. The format is explicitly stated through the use of a concrete noun in the form of a direct object, so that candidates are aware of the type of text that they need to produce. In the case of sample E3, there is the implication that the candidate already understands the generic conventions of a speech, as the exam paper itself does not explain them. By prescribing the format, candidates are limited to using certain expressions and phrases on a sentential and structural level in order for their response to adhere to the specific conventions of that format. A speech, for example, demands specific structural conventions, such as arguing for or against a statement or point of view, or using supporting evidence, and sentential conventions, such as rhetorical questions and comparative clauses. They also require audience-bound conventions, such as direct address and an appreciation of who the audience might be. Whilst

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this, in itself, is not an inherent issue, the mark schemes require candidates to use a tone, style and register that is 'appropriate' to the task (MS3. In addition, they have to demonstrate a 'clear understanding of purpose and audience' (MS3) just to achieve a middle-band mark, and so there is little room to be creative when deploying these conventions as candidates must demonstrate that they are meeting this criteria and understanding the task. In the qualitative data, teaching staff frequently commented that creativity in the exam is 'limited to fulfilling objectives' and that the 'accurate implementation of stylistic features and structure' (response 1, q2) achieve higher marks than the content of what is written. One teacher even says that she has taught students that have an 'innate creativity' which they use in their writing, but that 'technical accuracy has let them down' (response 4, q5). From this analysis, it is obvious that the necessity of utilising specific techniques and structures within candidates' responses has more weighting than anything creative that they might write.

The presentation of all the questions is generally similar, with the exception of samples E3 and E4, which provide bullet points to aid candidates in responding to the question (see figure 8 below).

- 5 Write a speech for your class in which you argue that violence is not the solution to conflict between people.
- In your speech you should:
- explain why peaceful solutions are better than violent ones
- 6 *The Outsider.*
- Use this as a title for a story or a piece of personal writing.
- In your writing you should:
- choose a clear viewpoint

**Figure 8: question 5 from sample E3, and question 6 from sample E4.**

[40]\*





As these are listed in a horizontal, sequential order, the exam paper indirectly imposes a structure that candidates should follow, i.e. start with the first 'explain why...' point, and continue horizontally. Whilst candidates are not explicitly limited to following that specific structure, it subconsciously plants the idea that the bullet pointed structure is the ideal one through the use of deontic modality with the modal verb 'should'. Although 'should' normally implies advice, in the context of an exam paper - in which the candidates are likely to have been taught to obey the exam instructions - this is intensified into a feeling of obligation due to the authority that the exam paper has in comparison to the student. Students are more likely to feel that they must follow the advice in order to do well, as it is coming from a powerful entity, and by following the prescriptive instructions set, the potential room for individual creativity is limited.

### **Analysis: visual/written stimuli**

In samples E1, E3 and E4, candidates are offered the choice of two questions. This is positive in the sense that a) it increases the chances that the question wording might spark a student's creative flair, and b) it allows the student a wider scope for being creative. E1 contains the only example of visual stimuli in all the examples: a photograph of a train being hit by sea waves is featured, with the question offering candidates the choice to 'write a description suggested by this picture'. This is reproduced in figure 9 overleaf.

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**Either:**

Write a description suggested by this picture:



**Or:**

Write the opening part of a story about a place that is severely affected by the weather.

(24 marks for content and organisation  
16 marks for technical accuracy)  
**[40 marks]**

**Figure 9: train photograph featured in sample E1.**

Here, there is more room for interpretation from the candidate, and this question allows significant scope for the writing of a creative response. The open-endedness and brevity of the instruction leaves room for individual creative input on the part of the candidate. In addition to this, as the picture is of a concrete object, it allows candidates to easily conceptualise it; with this, they can then produce a written piece that is based on something tangible that they can cognitively imagine, as opposed to an abstract concept that might not be imagined as easily or as specifically, such as love or greed. In addition, it appears as if this picture has been taken purposely to provide several potential areas about which candidates may



choose to write: the sea, the houses, and the moving train, for example, could all allow for a lengthy and in-depth creative response from the candidate. This question provides the room required for 'extensive and ambitious' use of vocabulary that is referred to in the higher bands of the mark schemes (MS1), and is much less prescriptive than the other questions.

Written stimulus, too, as seen in sample E2, allow candidates an opportunity for their own personal elaboration, as seen in figure 10:

0	5	Homework has no value. Some students get it done for them; some don't do it at all. Students should be relaxing in their free time.'
Write an article for a broadsheet newspaper in which you explain your point of view on this statement.		

**Figure 10: question 5 from sample E2.**

This type of question offers candidates the opportunity to argue for or against the categorical statement, as opposed to limiting them to one set view like in sample E3:

5	Write a speech for your class in which you argue that violence is not the solution to conflict between people.
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**Figure 11: sample E3**

In E3, the chance for personal reflection and opinion is completely withdrawn. Candidates are forced to adopt the view that violence does not solve conflict between people, regardless of what they might actually think. The paper shoehorns candidates into arguing what the exam paper states, rather than allowing them to argue about something on which they might actually have an opinion, thus further limiting their creative licence. Moreover, as each mark scheme requires a candidates' response to demonstrate their understanding of the task, going against the statement and subverting the notion might actually be detrimental to a

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candidate's performance, as it depends somewhat on whether or not the examiner believes that the task has been understood well. MS3 states that, in order to achieve a middle-band mark, candidates should 'show a clear understanding of purpose and audience', and thus an attempt towards being creative may be interpreted as a misunderstanding of the question by the examiner. In addition, Oliver et al. (2006, p.46), in their study on what higher education students see as a role model, link 'being subversive, for example, by rejecting convention' to somebody 'being creative'. It can be reasonably assumed that by prescribing the line of argument to the student as in E3, students are not likely to feel as if they are being given the opportunity to be creative because the wording is such that the statement cannot be subverted.

### **Conclusions, implications and suggestions**

Using three types of data, this study has provided just a snapshot of the way in which the exam system and its assessment enables and limits creativity.

In analysing the exam rubrics, it is clear that the use of the passive voice could potentially dissuade candidates from being creative. The authoritative tone and distance that it creates gives the ideological implication that the rubric advice – such as timing and planning indications – should not be ignored, thus encroaching on a candidate's creative freedom and thought. Quantitative data also suggests that the exam format, i.e. the rubric, does not enable creativity to a large extent.

Whilst creativity is encouraged by the question formation in some samples through the use of open-ended statements (in E2), in the majority of the samples there is a lack of room for subversion and creative interpretation. The formulaic nature of samples E3 and E4 – where the genre, audience and purpose are prescribed –

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combined with their mark schemes, forces candidates to include specific structures and phrases in order for them to show an understanding of the task set. This limits their opportunities for being creative. Qualitative data also suggests that more importance is given to the inclusion of these structures as opposed to the candidate's demonstration of creativity. Although some parameters need to be set for candidates to be able to produce a response, exam boards could do this by setting a wider range of questions that cover a many different parameters, instead of setting merely two questions that cover three parameters – format, audience and purpose – so prescriptively.

In terms of positive observations, it can be concluded that the use of visual stimuli does enable candidates to produce something that can be considered more creative, as this type of question is inherently broader. However, given the fact that only one piece of visual stimuli is included in all 4 of the samples, one could assume that visual stimuli are not commonly included in these types of exam papers. It would not be unreasonable to suggest that exam boards offer the choice for candidates to write one response based on a visual stimulus, at-least for the creative writing section of the exam paper, to provide them with more opportunity to be creative both in their writing and their interpretation.

Due to its limited nature and scope, this report has not been able to address the whole range of issues raised by the data. It has highlighted, however, that there is wealth of data available from the exam boards, and even a small sample from 6 teachers has provided a general idea of the multiple issues surrounding creativity in exams. There is much room for further research and I believe that this should be conducted on a larger scale in order to make further informed recommendations

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for improving the ways in which the English Language GCSE exams may incorporate creativity. This research should also extend to GCSEs as a whole set of qualifications, instead of merely English Language, to provide an overall view of creativity in the as well.

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## **Appendix A: Adapted copy of the National Curriculum for English for Key Stages 3 and 4**

Key Stages 3 and 4 are the terms given to the pupils in school, aged 11-16. This appendix provides a general brief overview of the National Curriculum of these, which is referred to in the Literature Review of this report. The following two pages provide a summary of the National Curriculum in secondary schools in English, and has been taken from the larger, 102-paged document, at:

[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/381754/SECONDARY\\_national\\_curriculum.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/381754/SECONDARY_national_curriculum.pdf). [Accessed 9 January 2015].

## **Appendix B: copy of Assessment Objectives set by Ofqual/DfE**

Assessment objectives (AOs) are set by Ofqual and are the same across all GCSE English Language specifications and all exam boards.

This appendix only contains the AOs that are assessed in the weighted GCSE exams that this report analyses and deals with. These are AOs 1-6:

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Assessment objective	Descriptor
AO1	Identify and interpret explicit and implicit information and ideas select and synthesise evidence from different texts
AO2	Explain, comment on and analyse how writers use language and structure to achieve effects and influence readers, using relevant subject terminology to support their views
AO3	Compare writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed, across two or more texts
AO4	Evaluate texts critically and support this with appropriate textual references
AO5	Communicate clearly, effectively and imaginatively, selecting and adapting tone, style and register for different forms, purposes and audiences. Organise information and ideas, using structural and grammatical features to support coherence and cohesion of texts
AO6	Candidates must use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures for clarity, purpose and effect, with accurate spelling and punctuation. (This requirement must constitute 20% of the marks for each specification as a whole.)

Table compiled using material from:

<http://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/english/gcse/english-language-8700/scheme-of-assessment>. [Accessed 10 Jan 2015].