

Four Perspectives on Transition: English Literature from Sixth Form to University

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Four Perspectives on Transition: English Literature from Sixth Form to University

Andrew Green
School of Sport and Education
Brunel University

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Foreword

The English Subject Centre is deeply committed to enhancing the relations between the forms of English practised in higher education, and those which flourish in schools. At the forefront of these preoccupations is 'transition': a label which is now widely used as a shorthand for a bunch of issues to do with the simultaneously intellectual, social and emotional process of moving from school or college to university. Even where (as is increasingly the case) students remain in their home communities, often with the same paid jobs and occupying the same social world, the shift into Higher Education clearly involves a degree of uprooting. After the intensive experience of A-level and the sense that tutors know you personally, moving into a scattered timetable of some 8 contact hours a week, finding yourself in a lecture hall with perhaps 300 others, and being expected to manage your own study is widely experienced as a shock. While the picture varies from institution to institution (and of course from student to student), entering university after the highly regulated and assessed world of college and school results in many students feeling lost and anxious, and unsure what it is they are supposed to do. Thus cohort demoralisation spreads.

Becoming a university student has always had its difficulties as well as its joys. This was the case even when a high proportion of students came from 'traditional' backgrounds. Widening access means that there are now relatively and actually many more students for whom the social, intellectual and personal strains of transition are felt

even more acutely, and who may in many cases lack family or social support for the oddities of their new life. Universities, conscious that the problem of retention is most acute in the first year, are generally concerned to help students through this transition, but frequently solutions will need to be worked out at a subject level. We owe it our students not to leave them all at sea at this vulnerable moment. (It would in any case be a self-defeating policy.) Believing that we needed more evidence to assist the HE English community in responding to the changing world of transition, the English Subject Centre commissioned Andrew Green, Lecturer and Subject Tutor for English in the School of Sport and Education at Brunel University, to carry out some research. The result is the report before you which explores the phenomenon of transition from the angle of school students and their teachers on the one hand, and first year undergraduates and their teachers on the other. We believe that this is an exceptionally valuable and suggestive piece of work which will foster understanding among university colleagues, and provide further underpinning as departments think through ways of supporting their students. This report clearly has major implications for the way we teach and assess first year students, for our curricula, and for the means by which we foster risk-taking and self-managed learning. We strongly commend it to the subject community.

Ben Knights,
Director, English Subject Centre

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I. Introduction

I.0.0 Rationale

The problematic nature of transition from school or further education college to university is well documented (Ozga & Sukhnandan: 1998; Cook & Leckey: 1999; Lowe & Cook: 2003). The specific problems for students of English moving from one institution to another and coming to terms with a new set of cognitive and metacognitive demands, teaching practices, study patterns, levels of independence, assumptions, expectations and assessment procedures are myriad and complex (Smith: 2003; Marland: 2003; Clerehan: 2003; Stewart, J. & McCormack, C.: 1997; Smith: 2004; Ballinger, 2003). For this reason it is vital that serious attention is given to the experience of students moving into Higher Education from a variety of institutional and academic backgrounds. It is also vital to consider how they manage the experience of change and why they either succeed or fail in making the necessary academic shift.

Professor Ben Knights, in the February 2004 edition of the *English Subject Centre Newsletter*, identifies: the perceived and growing gulf between English as practised in school under the influence of the National Curriculum, National Literacy Strategy and Curriculum 2000, and that practised in Higher Education.¹

One of the central purposes of this report is to explore the extent to which such a gulf in fact exists and to consider its nature. It also seeks to suggest ways in which the gulf could be addressed. A key issue here is the formalisation and extension of cross-phase dialogue (by which is meant dialogue between secondary and higher education) and a convergence of practice; without such dialogue any discrepancies between the two systems will be amplified and there is a real and present danger of further divergence.

I.1.0 Intentions

The intention of this Subject Centre Report is to offer an initial insight into the complex and problematic issue of transition in English. It approaches the issue from the perspectives of four key stakeholder groups and pays particular attention to:

- differences in expectation and paradigm between post-16 and university English;
- pedagogic approaches to English at post-16 and university level;

- the perceived purposes of these approaches and their impact on student learning;
- the assessment of English post-16 and the impact this has on students' learning and on their perceptions of the purposes of learning;
- how effectively post-16 English study prepares students for the continued study of English at Level 1.

I.2.0 Context and Population

This report has been structured to reflect the views of four major groups in the transition from post-16 to university education:

- Sixth Form students;
- Sixth Form teachers and lecturers;
- Degree Level 1 students;
- University lecturers.

Each of these groups is a significant stakeholder in the process of transition. The perspective of each group reflects a varying set of expectations, concerns and interests. In this differing (and in some ways conflicting) set of responses lie issues that cast light on the difficult issue of transition. The data presented here is the outcome of a set of four linked questionnaires, looking to establish a multiplicity of views of "common ground". The categories of questions remain constant within all four questionnaires and are intended to provide a range of data allowing for meaningful comparison.

To gather this information, two types of institution have been surveyed:

- post-16 institutions, covering the maintained, further education and independent sectors within England;
- English Higher Education institutions, including pre-1992 institutions, post-1992 institutions and university colleges.

Within the post-16 institutions, students following both A level and International Baccalaureate have been surveyed. Where relevant, this report points to the differing nature of study and assessment under these two routes and considers the effect this may have upon students' ability to manage the experience of transition.

¹ Knights, B. (2004) "Building Bridges: traversing the secondary/tertiary divide", *English Subject Centre Newsletter*, Issue 6, February 2004.

1.3.0 Assessment

Of particular interest (and arguably concern) is the nature and the role of assessment within English post-16, its impact on cognitive and metacognitive development and the range of student subject knowledge on entering Higher Education. The continuous demands of modular assessment, with a concomitant reduction in teaching time (particularly in the AS year), and the increasing emphasis on targeted Assessment Objectives are also a cause of concern to many university departments. This report considers the validity of such perceptions and concerns. Adrian Barlow's evaluation in Appendix I of the changing nature of post-16 English study and the Advanced Extension Awards is particularly interesting in its consideration of ways in which Programmes of Study and assessment under Curriculum 2000 may offer the type of sophistication and "risk taking" universities desire.

This report also considers the impact the current assessment regime has had upon levels of examination performance and levels of academic development, which are frequently (and simplistically) presented as synonymous. It presents and evaluates teachers' and lecturers' views on the impact of the QCA Assessment Objectives upon teaching, students' academic development and students' examination performance. This is of particular interest given that, in a recently published English Subject Centre survey of university English departments², whilst 43% of departments recorded an increasing student A level grade profile, they also lamented 'a marked drop in the standard of written English and in the range of reading'. Still more interestingly, in spite of such an apparent contradiction, 92% of the departments

in the survey identified examination performance as the principle criterion by which they select students and none have adopted alternative selection criteria beyond the UCAS form and interviews. The pragmatic approach many university departments have adopted towards admissions in the face of the developments of Curriculum 2000, a reform weakened by its voluntarist nature (Hodgson and Spours, 2003a), reflects an old-style concern with the "three good A levels" in spite of the changed nature of post-16 assessment and the impact this has had upon the ways in which teachers teach, students study and grades are attained. The link between post-16 and university English hinges on assessment and practice, and this report seeks to elucidate the important links between providers, students and end-users of the new-style A levels.

1.4.0 Teaching and Learning

A core focus of this report is the range of teaching and learning adopted at post-16 and Level 1, including a consideration of the extent to which teaching post-16 is influenced by the prescribed Assessment Objectives and the probable impact of this on students' academic experience and performance. A comparison of cross-phase pedagogic practice is essential in understanding students' experience of transition. The extent to which practices within the two sectors reflect or diverge from each other provides a fruitful area for consideration in addressing the challenges students face on entering university English courses and also serves to identify the differing assumptions of teachers and learners at both levels.

² Gawthrop, J. and Martin, P. (2003) *Survey of the English Curriculum and Teaching in UK Higher Education*. Royal Holloway, University of London, English Subject Centre, ISBN 0902194291

2. The Sixth Formers' Perspective

2.1.0 Introduction

As potential future 'consumers' of Higher Education, the views of sixth formers are central to the issue of transition. Sixth formers were surveyed from a range of post-16 institutions, including state schools, independent schools and sixth form colleges. The students surveyed were not selected and are not students necessarily intending to pursue English beyond their post-16 studies.

2.2.0 Breakdown of respondents

A total of 128 sixth formers were surveyed from five sixth form institutions. These five institutions comprised:

- two state comprehensive schools;
- two independent schools;
- one sixth form college.

All numerical data is presented in the form of percentages for ease of comparison.

Institution	Male	Female
State school	15%	85%
Independent school	61%	39%
6th Form college	23%	77%
Total	30%	70%

2.2.1 By gender

Key observations:

- UCAS data for 2003 indicates a total of 8553 accepts of which 6228 were female and 2325 are male, a percentage breakdown of 73% female to 27% male. The breakdown of respondents in the survey is, therefore, broadly typical of the entrant population of undergraduate English courses.
- Striking is the substantially higher percentage of males undertaking the study of English post-16 in the independent schools surveyed, where males outweigh females.

2.2.2 By age group

All respondents to the survey fell within the under 20 age range, and as such represent the largest group of Sixth Form students and the largest university applicant group.

2.2.3 By educational institution

Type of institution	
State school	20%
Independent school	22%
6th Form college	58%

2.2.4 By target qualification

2.2.4.1 State schools

	International Baccalaureate	English Literature	English Language & Literature
Male	0%	100%	0%
Female	0%	100%	0%

2.2.4.2 State 6th Form colleges

	International Baccalaureate	English Literature	English Language & Literature
Male	0%	82%	18%
Female	0%	100%	0%

2.2.4.3 Independent schools

	International Baccalaureate	English Literature	English Language & Literature
Male	35%	65%	0%
Female	45%	55%	0%

Key observations:

- No claims are made as to the representative nature of these statistical breakdowns on a local or national level. The figures are solely a breakdown of the qualifications sought by the respondents.
- Striking is the predominance of English Literature, which is the majority subject followed within all types of institution. All state school respondents and the vast majority of sixth form college respondents follow this option. It is also the majority option, though by a much lesser margin in the independent schools surveyed.
- A small percentage of respondents follow English Language & Literature as an option, though these are limited to the sixth form colleges and are all male. This may be indicative of the wider appeal of English Language and Literature as an option to male candidates, but undoubtedly also reflects the greater possibilities in terms of grouping and timetabling of options available to sixth form colleges as opposed to schools.
- A significant number of respondents following English qualifications within the independent sector are taking the International Baccalaureate. The proportion taking the International Baccalaureate is higher among male respondents than female respondents.

2.3.0 Teaching and Learning

Students were asked to identify, selecting from “Often”, “Sometimes” and “Never”, the frequency with which a selection of teaching and learning strategies were employed in their English teaching sessions. They were also asked to indicate using a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not useful) to 4 (very useful), how beneficial they find each of these teaching and learning strategies in their development as students of English, providing substantiating comments if they wished.

2.3.1 Reading in advance

This question asked students to consider requirements to undertake pre-reading of any description, whether of their set text, theoretical or other contextual material.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
4%	73%	24%	3%	9%	51%	37%

Typical comments on the advantages of pre-reading are as follows:

- preparedness for teaching sessions;
- the opportunity to develop independent responses before teaching and discussion;
- contextual and/or theoretical pre-reading helps provide ways in which to read the text;
- increased confidence to contribute in teaching session;
- increased familiarity with text(s) and the opportunity to clarify personal understanding;
- organisational benefits;
- time-saving – maximising lesson time.

2.3.2 Guided reading tasks in groups

This question addressed the use of targeted passage-based reading in class, followed up by specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
2%	39%	59%	7%	7%	44%	42%

Typical comments on the benefits of this approach are as follows:

- broadens range of understanding;
- opportunity to exchange, develop and test out responses and ideas (some students, however, indicate that such a proliferation of views can lead to uncertainty and insecurity);
- opportunity for detailed textual annotation and note-taking;
- smaller group context encourages participation;
- assists in development of independent analytical skills;
- adds interest and variety to teaching sessions.

2.3.3 Reading as a class

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
1%	59%	40%	10%	21%	43%	26%

Comments on this technique demonstrate greater uncertainty as to value. Some are positive:

- clarity;
- benefits of hearing a good reader;
- range of interpretations in reading;
- particularly useful in drama texts.

A significant number of adverse comments also arise, however:

- time-consuming;
- teaching time can be more constructively employed;
- frustration with bad readers;
- concentration can drift;
- some students are uncomfortable reading aloud.

Key points:

- Given the prevalence of this as a teaching technique, it is significant that a substantial minority of students question its validity and value.
- A significant divergence emerges here with practice in the Higher Education sector; where respondents indicate that this is a reluctantly (and usually reactively) employed technique.

2.3.4 Whole class discussion

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	38%	62%	3%	10%	30%	57%

Typical comments on its benefits are as follows:

- stimulating exposure to a wide range of views;
- widens response to and knowledge of the text;
- opportunity to exchange, develop and test out ideas;
- opportunity for note-taking and textual annotation.

Some negative views also emerge, however:

- possibility of ill-guided discussion becoming irrelevant;
- tendency of some students to dominate discussion;
- not all students are willing or able to contribute.

2.3.5 Group/pair discussion

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	44%	56%	7%	14%	42%	37%

Many of the advantages identified echo those in 2.3.4. A number of significant differences arise, however: Some are positive:

- quieter and less confident students are more willing to contribute;
- groups can be used to cover a range of topics for presentation back to the whole class.

Disadvantages are also identified:

- a more limited range of views emerges;
- teacher moderation of ideas is not always available;
- groups can lack focus and drift;
- pairings and groupings can limit or even inhibit response.

2.3.6 Close textual analysis

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
1%	30%	69%	0%	6%	34%	60%

Students particularly identified the following benefits:

- close focus on issues of language (e.g. style, tone, lexis, register, imagery);
- inferential reading;
- relation of parts to the whole;
- key examination skill.

2.3.7 Research using other materials

In this question, students were asked to consider the extent to which they are required to use literary theory, literary criticism, context material and other literary material in developing their response to set texts.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
9%	72%	19%	10%	15%	45%	30%

Particular benefits identified are as follows:

- examination use;
- widens general knowledge and opens the mind;
- value of informed responses to text;
- insight into generic features;
- wider reading is valuable.

Significantly, however, a number of respondents identify:

- difficulties in perceiving relevance;
- difficulties in applying contextual, critical and theoretical material;
- confusion in the face of a multiplicity of materials and interpretations.

Key points:

- Given the requirement in Assessment Objective 4 for Advanced level students to “articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers” and in Assessment Objective 5 to “show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood and evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study” such a distribution of response is surprising (see Appendix 2).
- Given the precedence of such issues within Higher Education paradigms of English, such a response highlights a significant area of potential difficulty in transition.

2.3.8 Student presentation

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
33%	59%	8%	15%	29%	35%	21%

Comments indicate students' ambivalent views on this approach. Advantages are:

- opportunity to develop expertise on a particular issue or aspect of a text;
- possibility for a range of issues to be covered within a single teaching session;
- the development of communication skills.

Significant disadvantages, however, are:

- boredom;
- repetitiveness where groups are covering the same issues;
- pressure and stress in formally presenting to the group;
- lack of confidence;
- presentations can be very brief and lacking in substance;
- the process is time-consuming.

Key points:

- Whilst the advantages of this approach to the individual student in formulating a formal, informed and personal response are potentially great, the benefits in terms of feedback to the rest of the teaching group are more questionable.
- The lack of formal assessment of student presentations and the extent to which knowledge is valued by assessment under Curriculum 2000 may lead to an inherent sense that they lack value.
- The International Baccalaureate provides a very interesting contrast in this respect. All candidates are expected to undertake a fifteen-minute presentation on a comparative literature task of their choice. This amounts to 30% of their final assessment.

2.3.9 Teacher presentation

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
16%	54%	30%	7%	14%	41%	38%

The majority of respondents cling to the teacher presentation as a key source of learning, indicating, perhaps, a lack of confidence in their own "knowledge" and a lack of real desire for independence. Typical views are:

- the teacher is the fount of all knowledge;
- an opportunity for copious (and uncritical?) note-taking;
- "comfort" in being lectured;
- shows the way things should be done.

A minority of students expressed a more interesting set of ideas, seeing the teacher presentation in a rather different light. Typical views are:

- dislike lack of opportunity for personal engagement;
- prefer learning through personal engagement with text;
- do not find it useful to be "spoon-fed";
- try to use teacher presentations as the basis for further personal exploration.

Key points:

- The significance of the differences between these two perceptions of learning and their implications for the study of English in Higher Education, where autonomy and independence of thought take on great importance, is self-evident.
- There is good reason to believe that many students at this level (and as they progress into Higher Education) cling to the security of the lecture and take copious notes, a sign of their fundamental insecurity in selecting and evaluating information in the lecture forum (Smith, 2004).

2.3.10 Use of Directed Activities Related to Texts

In this question students were asked to comment on the use of activities such as sequencing, tabulation, cloze (word substitution), prediction exercises, etc. in their teaching sessions. (Lunzer & Gardner, 1979)

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
25%	54%	21%	15%	24%	34%	27%

Typical views of the advantages of this method are as follows:

- breaks the text down;
- useful for categorising and recording information;
- organisational benefits;
- active involvement "in" and with the text;
- great variety possible;
- appreciation of the "visual" and "kinaesthetic" quality of learning (Gardner, 1983).

2.3.11 Audio-visual/ICT stimulus

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
14%	70%	16%	10%	20%	40%	30%

Responses to this offered views on four separate media:

- televisual texts and resources;
- audio resources;
- the internet;
- presentational programmes such as PowerPoint.

2.3.11.1 Televisual texts and resources

Some students commented on the use of videos of authors, actors, famous readers and/or critics discussing texts. These were generally valued for the variety of insight and interpretations they offered of text, context, reception of text and author:

Many more commented on the use of film or television adaptations of set texts. Views on these tended to divide into four categories:

- “visual” and “auditory” learners (Gardner, 1983) who appreciate these elements within the media versions used;
- highly pragmatic students who view such diversions from the text as an unwelcome distraction;
- students who view televisual texts as interesting critical interpretations of the original text, using them as a basis for personal reflection on the text and further discussion;

- students who (potentially dangerously) see such texts as useful tools in comprehending the text.

2.3.11.2 Audio resources

Students commenting in this area are not specific as to the nature of these audio resources.

2.3.11.3 Internet

The internet is cited as a prime research resource. In terms of transition into Higher Education, this has clear implications for the acknowledgement and referencing of sources.

2.3.11.4 PowerPoint

Students commenting on this appreciate the “visual” dimension of this medium and also comment on the ways in which it aids organisation and note-taking.

2.3.12 Drama-based activities

In this question students were asked to comment on the use of activities such as hot-seating, role-play, character monologues, staging exercises and improvisation in their teaching sessions.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
48%	49%	3%	35%	28%	22%	15%

Key points:

- Views on this set of approaches are, as may be expected, widely diverse. Many students’ dislike of such methods (“a waste of time”; “not useful, can’t act”) and the exposure they entail is counterbalanced by a significant number of students who very strongly value them, appreciating the personal and proactive engagement with text that

they require (value is particularly placed on the creative extension of text and empathy).

- Given the high value a significant number of students place upon these approaches, the lack of use of them in 48% of cases raises questions as to the efficiency with which student needs and preferences in learning are being met in this respect.

2.3.13 Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
22%	50%	28%	0%	25%	25%	50%

Key points:

- Given the comparatively high proportion of students who value such approaches and the obvious benefits accruing in terms of insight into authors' choices in terms of narrative, character, imagery, lexis, etc. the importance of these techniques within learning is evident.

2.4.0 How confident do you feel in your independent ability to read, analyse and respond to a text you are approaching for the first time?

1 – lack confidence	2 – not very confident	3 – confident	4 – very confident
4%	21%	63%	12%

This question was included as an indicator of the success of post-16 teaching in preparing students for their current level of examination. The high proportion of students stating that they are confident or very confident would indicate that study at this level in its own terms is successful as far as students are concerned.

2.5.0 How confident would you feel to enter the study of English at university?

1 – lack confidence	2 – not very confident	3 – confident	4 – very confident
13%	50%	28%	9%

In comparison with the responses presented in 2.4.0, this provides an interesting contrast. Whilst in its own terms post-16 study imbues students with confidence in their own abilities, when placed in the context of further study, confidence is much lower. This may be owing to a number of factors:

- students' lack of clarity in terms of what university English study entails;
- the fact that for many students their study of English will not progress beyond Advanced GCE or International Baccalaureate level;

- other concerns related to the transition to university that are not explicitly subject-based (Lowe & Cook, 2003; Cook & Leckey, 1999; Ozga & Sukhmandan, 1998; Booth, 1997).

Given current trends in terms of entry to university, however, and the widening participation agenda with its target of 50% participation by 2010, universities will be accepting an ever-widening range of students with ever-widening abilities, expectations and needs. This highlights universities' need to provide effective programmes of transition to facilitate students' progression into Higher Education and to secure retention, (especially in the face of mounting financial disincentives).

2.6.0 What abilities do you believe are necessary to succeed in the study of English at university?

Responses in this section demonstrated a surprising consistency and can be broadly grouped, in no particular order of importance, as follows:

- communication skills;
- essay writing skills;
- ability to formulate, structure and sustain argument in a variety of situations;
- analytical abilities;
- dedication and self-motivation;
- note-taking abilities;
- independent study skills;
- interest and enthusiasm;
- research skills;
- an open mind, curiosity and a willingness to change;
- creativity;
- good general knowledge;
- knowledge of literary criticism and theory;
- wide reading;
- love of and confidence in reading.

2.7.0 What approaches do you think are used in teaching English at university?

Responses here tended to be fairly non-specific, though the following emerge as major themes:

- lectures;
- seminars;
- one-to-one tutorials.

There seems to be little in the way of conception of what such teaching incorporates or the role the student will play in each beyond a basic sense of "listening" and even "being dictated to" in lectures and "group discussion" in seminars.

Other key points that emerge in a number of responses are:

- use of drama approaches;
- the role of independent study;
- a general sense that university will be a more impersonal experience than at school or college.

2.8.0 What teaching approaches would you find most useful?

Students offered few useful indications in this area, but three key points emerge:

- a general preference for the small group rather than large group learning forums;
- a desire to focus on the demands and skills associated with essay writing at university level (note this was less a concern amongst International Baccalaureate students who, as part of their final assessment have to produce a long essay similar in length and cognitive demand to early undergraduate essays);
- a preference amongst a significant number of students for active approaches to learning rather than "just being lectured to".

2.9.0 Indicate the number of hours/week you think university students are expected to dedicate to: i) lectures, seminars and tutorials; ii) independent study.

Lectures, seminars and tutorials					
Hours/week	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
	15%	48%	23%	9%	5%

This demonstrates the general lack of awareness amongst sixth form students of the extent of contact teaching time they will receive, with 37% anticipating more contact input than they are likely to receive (that is those who anticipated 11 hours or more). This is an important issue for university departments to consider as they prepare incoming students for their first year studies. With much greater emphasis upon independent study and the concomitant skills required, university departments need to consider how Level 1 students can be helped to structure and effectively employ their independent study time.

Independent study					
Hours/week	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21+
	16%	25%	12%	21%	26%

Sixth form students' expectations for independent study are far more generous than the times actually allotted by first year undergraduate students surveyed, even allowing for combination degrees and major/minor programmes of study.

3. Level I Students' Perspective

3.1.0 Introduction

Students come to the study of English at Level I from a range of academic backgrounds, be it Advanced GCE, International Baccalaureate, Access or other entry routes. They are faced with a system of learning and teaching that is related to, but distinctly different from their habitual experience at school or college and within this context have to take a new level of responsibility for developing their own modes of study, often involving long hours of independent work. They also have to respond to an ever-growing perspective of what it means to study English – not only in terms of content (the “what” of study), but also in terms of approaches to study (the “how” of study) and theoretical paradigms of study (the “why” of study) – views often very different from those developed in their English education post-16.

For the purposes of this study, 113 Level I students have been surveyed in five institutions. The institutions surveyed comprise:

- two pre-1992 universities;
- two post-1992 universities;
- one university college.

3.2 Breakdown of respondents

All numerical data is presented in the form of percentages for ease of comparison.

3.2.1 By Institution type

Institutions selected for survey were chosen solely on the basis of their institution type, so that a representative sample of the Higher Education sector could be established, reflecting the experiences of students following courses in a variety of circumstances. The institutions sampled are also from geographically diverse areas, so responses may also reflect a range of local concerns and circumstances. The primary purpose, however, is to establish how a variety of students experience the teaching and learning of English at university and the issues this may raise with regard to effective transition to degree level study.

3.2.2 By gender

Gender	Male	Female
	13%	87%

3.2.3 By age

Age range	<21	21-30	31-40	41-50
	71%	16%	11%	2%

3.2.4 By sixth form background

Sixth form institution	State school	Sixth Form College	Independent school	Other
	15%	42%	21%	22%

3.2.5 By entry qualification

Entry Qualification	Advanced GCE	International Baccalaureate	Access	GNVQ	Other
	82%	2%	8%	0%	8%

3.2.6 By programme

Programme followed	Single honours	Combined honours	Major/Minor
	39%	54%	7%

3.3.0 Teaching hours

Students were asked to identify the number of timetabled hours' teaching in English they receive in the course of a week in lectures and seminars and to indicate whether they receive tutorials. They were also asked to identify how many hours per week they dedicate, on average, to independent reading and study.

3.3.1 Lectures

Hours/week	0-5	6-10
Single Hons	90%	10%
Combined Hons	86%	14%
Major/Minor	83%	17%

3.3.2 Seminars

Hours/week	0-5	6-10
Single Hons	85%	15%
Combined Hons	83%	17%
Major/Minor	33%	67%

3.3.3 Tutorials

Hours/week	Tutorial	No tutorial
	14%	86%

The relatively low proportion of students receiving a timetabled weekly tutorial is low. The reasons for this in terms of practicality and labour intensiveness are self-evident. It is worth observing, however, the extent to which students value the tutorial and its more intimate environment. Drew's findings (2001) that "tutorials were prized most highly, for help with subject and work, for feedback on progress... and for personal support"³ are of interest, especially given the low number of students continuing to receive tutorials. Where such a highly valued aid to learning with its more personal attention and focus is removed, support within the individual learning environment of the university department may be a major factor contributing to ineffective transition.

3.3.4 Independent study

Hours/week	0-10	11-20	21+
	70%	19%	11%

3.4.0 Why did you choose to study English at university?

Level I students offered a range of responses to this question. The most common reasons presented are, in no particular order:

- ability in the subject;
- attainment of good grades at Advanced level;
- personal fulfilment;
- intellectual challenge;
- English is a versatile degree;
- interest and enjoyment (particularly of Advanced level studies);
- links to career paths;
- the desire to become teachers of English.

Key points:

- For some students the reason for entering higher level English study is perceived ability and concrete attainment. Whilst in themselves not necessarily bad motivations to wish to study the subject, such dispassionate responses are slightly disconcerting. Unless combined with an element of love and enthusiasm for the subject, especially given its rather different nature within the Higher Education context, such motivations may well wane.
- Encouragingly, enthusiasm for the subject is the stated reason for many respondents. A passion for the subject and the attendant desire to learn and develop with it are essential components of success in degree level study. However, given that many respondents specifically identified their love of the subject with their love of study at Advanced level, whether this love will translate into the new teaching and learning environment of a university department and whether paradigm shifts in the nature of English study will continue to enthuse is open to question.

³ Drew, S. (2001) "Student Perceptions of What Helps The Learn and Develop in Higher Education" *Teaching in Higher Education* 6: 323.

- Many students perceive the value and versatility of an English degree, including the cognitive and metacognitive challenges it poses and the range of useful skills they develop through their studies, linking this specifically to future career paths.
- A significant number of respondents identify that their primary reason (or one of their primary reasons) for wishing to study English at university is the desire to become English teachers. This reflects very interestingly on issues of transition into and out of the world of Higher Education, as well as questions of subject paradigm, inter-relations and influence. Students entering degree level English study mostly do so from the perspectives, rationales

and paradigms of the National Curriculum and Curriculum 2000, and bring these to bear on their studies. For those intent on pursuing careers as English teachers, such influences may even become a significant influence on their choices and perceptions of programmes of study. Students who enter teaching as a profession inevitably return to school-based curricula in the light of their university studies and as such face a new set of transition issues. This complex set of inter-relationships highlights still further the need to establish meaningful connections between school-based and university-based teachers and students of English.

3.5.0 Teaching and learning

Students were asked to identify, selecting from "Often", "Sometimes" and "Never", the frequency with which a selection of teaching and learning strategies were employed in their teaching sessions, identifying as appropriate lecture and/or seminar context. They were also asked to indicate using a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not useful) to 4 (very useful), how beneficial they find each of these teaching and learning strategies in their development as students, providing substantiating comments if they wished.

3.5.1 Student advance reading

This question asked students to consider pre-reading of any description, whether of their set text, theoretical or other contextual material.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	4%	31%	65%	0%	22%	60%	18%
Seminar	0%	29%	71%	0%	3%	25%	72%

This is a frequently adopted preparation for both lectures and seminars. It is highly valued, the large majority of respondents identifying it as a useful or very useful technique. Typical observations are as follows:

- secures basic textual knowledge before teaching;
- formulation of ideas and initial responses before teaching;
- provides focus for teaching session;
- ensures preparation for the session;
- contextualises teaching session.

3.5.2 Guided reading tasks in groups

This question addressed the use of targeted passage-based reading in teaching sessions, followed up by specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	27%	46%	27%	8%	8%	36%	48%
Seminar	3%	46%	51%	1%	12%	47%	40%

This is a technique used considerably less frequently in the lecture than in the seminar; owing, no doubt, to the logistical difficulties of managing such activities in the large group context. There is a strong perception that this is a useful or very useful technique.

A number of distinct advantages to this approach are identified:

- in-depth study;

- facilitates individual response;
- sharing of ideas;
- promotion of discussion.

Students also comment on:

- the need for such activities to be carefully monitored to ensure focus and purpose are maintained;
- the need for clarity of purpose and outcome.

3.5.3 Reading as a class

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	49%	41%	10%	13%	25%	27%	35%
Seminar	27%	58%	15%	11%	22%	31%	36%

This is not a frequently employed approach in either lectures or seminars. Unlike their lecturers, however, student opinion on the usefulness of this technique is much more evenly divided. Within the Higher Education system, where students are expected to display far greater autonomy and independence, the significant proportion of students who feel this is useful (and presumably, therefore, a necessary approach) is surprising. Certain respondents clearly like the security of following a whole class pattern of reading and exposition, an approach reassuringly familiar from the school context and quite remote from the 'risks' of independent interpretation and engagement.

Some more positive observations also emerge:

- enjoyment in the shared experience of hearing the text read;
- illuminating aural impressions from hearing text.

To balance this, many students also consider this approach to be a waste of valuable class time, when more active engagement with the text could and should be undertaken.

3.5.4 Whole class discussion

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Seminar	1%	31%	68%	1%	6%	24%	69%

This is a regularly employed approach within seminar teaching, where the smaller group context makes it viable. Most respondents consider this approach to be either useful or very useful. A number of specific advantages are identified:

- wider student engagement required;
- an opportunity to explore ideas and interpretations;
- open debate and exchange of ideas.

Students also observe:

- not all students are prepared to contribute as it can be intimidating;
- to ensure a balanced discussion, careful management of the forum by lecturers is required.

3.5.5 Group/pair discussion

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	44%	36%	20%	11%	8%	27%	54%
Seminar	1%	42%	57%	1%	6%	33%	60%

This is a technique less frequently employed in lectures than in seminars. It is highly valued in both contexts, as it allows students the opportunity to engage personally and to interact with issues and concepts arising from teaching. Particularly within the large lecture context, a few minutes to reflect upon and verbalise a personal response to the ideas put forward are invaluable in concretising learning.

Specific advantages include:

- much wider participation in discussion;

- variety;
- good opportunity to develop and extend ideas;
- a good forum in which to try out interpretations and ideas.

Some students identify the less moderated nature of discussion within the pair and a resultant tendency towards provisional responses and outcomes, especially where discussion tasks lack perceived precision of focus.

3.5.6 Close textual analysis

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	8%	52%	40%	1%	7%	32%	60%
Seminar	2%	35%	63%	0%	5%	27%	68%

More often employed in seminars than in lectures, this is, nevertheless, an approach employed widely in both contexts and highly valued by students in both. Appreciation is expressed for the benefits of focussing on the impact of 'micro' elements of the text and their relationship to wider issues, as well as the focus on developing analytical skills. A significant number of respondents, as in the case of sixth form students, link this approach specifically to benefits in terms of assessment, perhaps serving to illustrate the extent to which the student view is shaped by assessment rather than learning.

3.5.7 Approaches to text using other materials

In this question students were asked to consider the extent to which they use literary theory, literary criticism, context material and other literary material as stimulus within their teaching sessions.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	8%	62%	30%	2%	6%	46%	46%
Seminar	4%	47%	49%	54%	21%	18%	7%

This is a widely used approach in both lectures and seminars. Interestingly, however, while it is highly valued in lectures, in seminars the response is far more negative. This may indicate that whilst students are aware of the importance of literary theory in Higher Education English and appreciate its value in lectures, they are far more uncomfortable with the realities of using such theories in the more interactive context of the seminar. This is a view supported by the fact that in substantiating responses, students are able to offer very little detailed comment on the perceived benefits of this approach and find difficulty in expressing the intellectual and metacognitive benefits that would be expected. This is symptomatic, no doubt, of the expressed difficulties they experience in engaging with and applying such materials. Where comment on the benefits of this approach is offered, it tends to be limited to non-specific observations on the benefit of gaining a variety of views and/or assessment linked.

Key points:

- Given the centrality of theory and intertextual approaches within Higher Education English paradigms, students' inability to express concrete

learning benefits is an important issue. Their inability to verbalise metacognitive response suggests the extent to which schools and colleges approach theoretical, critical and contextual materials differently and suggests that the inclusion of theory and criticism within the QCA Assessment Objectives has not been particularly successful in widening or deepening this area of student response. This, therefore, becomes a core area of concern to university departments wishing to manage their students' effective transition.

- The discrepancy between the qualitative and quantitative responses to this approach suggests that students are aware of the importance of such issues within university paradigms of English (explaining the large-scale identification that these are useful or very useful) but are unable personally to relate to why this is so. This mismatch between the views of students and their lecturers is one that could valuably be explored to effect better 'bridging'.

3.5.8 Student presentation

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	71%	27%	2%	55%	21%	18%	6%
Seminar	25%	66%	9%	37%	31%	25%	7%

Only rarely used in lectures, student presentations are more frequently employed within seminars. The majority of respondents feel negatively about the usefulness of this approach.

Students typically identify:

- lack of interest;
- poor quality of presentations;
- questionable value of material presented.

On a more positive note, some respondents identify:

- the benefits of in-depth research in preparing presentations;
- development of communications skills.

These views are similar to those of all other respondent groups.

3.5.9 Lecturer presentation

	Usefulness			
	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	2%	8%	32%	58%
Seminar	4%	8%	31%	57%

The vast majority of students cling to the usefulness of the lecture as a format for teaching and do not maintain the critical distance from it that lecturers do. This may well be related to the low number of contact hours typical of English undergraduate courses, which encourages students to hold fervently to the valued contact time they have and to see the input of the lecturer at the heart of this.

Typical observations identify:

- in-depth presentation of lecturers' views;
- value sustained expert input.

3.5.10 Use of Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTs)

In this question students were asked to comment on the use of activities such as sequencing, tabulation, cloze (word substitution), prediction exercises, etc. in their teaching sessions. (Lunzer & Gardner, 1979)

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	52%	36%	12%	25%	25%	18%	32%
Seminar	39%	46%	15%	19%	19%	19%	43%

These are a largely unused techniques, although more frequently employed in seminars than in lectures and there is an almost even spread of views as to their value. The lack of substantiating comments from respondents in this section (as evident also in the response of sixth formers) suggests that the use of such activities and their potential benefits is little understood.

3.5.11 Audio-visual stimulus

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	19%	55%	26%	8%	15%	29%	48%
Seminar	22%	52%	26%	7%	15%	32%	46%

According to the vast majority of respondents, such approaches are sometimes or often employed in both lectures and seminars. There is also general agreement in terms of their usefulness, the vast majority again identifying that they are useful or very useful.

Respondents are not specific with regard to the nature of stimuli used, but identify their benefits as:

- tools in understanding;
- variety;
- aids in focussing attention.

The lack of specificity and critical engagement with the nature and value of these approaches, compared to the detailed responses of post-16 respondents, suggests that a more limited and less integrated range of media approaches is used at Level 1.

3.5.12 Drama-based activities

In this question students were asked to comment on the use of activities such as hot-seating, role-play, character monologues, staging exercises and improvisation in their teaching sessions.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	87%	13%	0%	45%	12%	15%	28%
Seminar	81%	15%	4%	44%	13%	14%	29%

This is a technique rarely used in either the lecture or the seminar context. In general students view this set of approaches in a negative light, but there are some fervent enthusiasts who appreciate the active nature of learning encouraged through drama approaches and wish they were more widely employed.

3.5.13 Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	58%	28%	14%	50%	13%	25%	12%
Seminar	29%	49%	22%	25%	12%	50%	13%

More frequently used in seminars than in lectures, such approaches are even less frequently employed than drama-based techniques. Views on the value of such approaches are similar to responses to drama techniques. Students generally do not display an awareness of the benefits accruing from active creative engagement in and with text and the processes of undertaking recreative writing, which can offer substantial insights into the function and operation of authorial techniques and choices.

3.6.0 How effectively do you think your study of English post-16 prepared you for the study of English at university?

Responses to this key question are varied. A large number of respondents indicate that they feel their post-16 study of English provided an adequate preparation for university study, although they are able to offer little in the way of informed comment on how it did so. Observations tend to be limited and generalised in their nature. The following are typical responses:

- essay writing skills;
- the benefits of revisiting texts studied at post-16 level;
- close and detailed study of text;
- A level provided useful basics on which to build;
- International Baccalaureate study required similar types of study and high levels of independence.

Far more prevalent and specific, even amongst respondents who identified generally positive views, were the following observations:

- the significant difference between post-16 and university English study;
- differences in materials studied;
- differences in the nature of study;
- the level of research expected came as a shock;
- detail and nature of analysis differs;

- teaching methods differ;
- the quantity of work expected at university is much greater;
- sixth form work is fully supervised, whilst university requires independence;
- university requires a different type of reading;
- quality of writing expected is higher at university;
- range of content and texts studied is much greater at university;
- differing expectations;
- a much wider range of perspectives is expected at university;
- range and quantity of reading is much greater at university;
- the pace of study surprises students;
- the level of independence required surprises students.

Key points:

- Whilst not necessarily a cause of concern to the respondents, this nevertheless provides a substantial body of evidence to indicate how subject paradigms and expectations differ between post-16 and university levels. There is clearly a real and present requirement for university departments to address these needs in their incoming students and to consider how these can be pre-empted.

3.7.0 What abilities do you believe are necessary to succeed in the study of English literature at degree level?

The abilities students identify are very similar to the abilities identified by all other participant groups in this study:

- love of reading;
- open-mindedness;
- creativity;
- self-motivation;
- independence;
- enthusiasm;
- analytical skills;
- writing skills;
- ability to work with theory;
- commitment and determination;
- organisation and time management;
- ability to work with others;
- adaptability.

3.8.0 What programmes did your school or college have in place to prepare you for studying at university level?

With only the exception of Access students, who have followed courses specifically designed to facilitate access to Higher Education, all respondents indicate that their schools or colleges provided nothing in the way of preparation for study at university. This may be evidence of the continuing drive on grade attainment and maximisation. The position may be exacerbated further by the difficulty of providing such support within the crowded post-16 curriculum. It is of concern, however, that students generally arrive at university without any real sense of the nature of higher academic study and its requirements.

3.9.0 What programmes does your university have in place to assist you in making the transition to university English?

Over 90% of Level 1 students responding to this survey indicate that their departments do not provide programmes to facilitate the transition into Level 1. A number of specific support systems are identified by a small minority of respondents:

- drop-in sessions with tutors;
- academic guidance;
- personal tutorials;
- study skills programmes;
- study diaries.

It is, of course, entirely possible that programmes to support transition are present within departments and integrated support is provided within Level 1 programmes of study. If this is the case, however, the fact that students as a whole remain unaware of such supports to their academic and personal development early in their studies proves a problem in its own right. If students are unaware that programmes are in place to meet their transition needs, it implies either that they are not fully aware of the nature of their needs or that the programmes are not fully effective. On the evidence of this survey, this appears to be an area for serious consideration.

4. Sixth Form Teachers' Perspective

4.1.0 Introduction

As the primary English academic contact for sixth formers, sixth form teachers and further education lecturers, like university lecturers, work at the juncture of advanced study (be it Advanced GCE, International Baccalaureate, Access or other entry routes) and undergraduate study. On a daily basis they are responsible for managing the transition from GCSE to advanced level study in English, developing in their students a growing and changing perspective of what it means to study English. Whether teachers at this level are so actively involved in seeking to ease the transition of their own students into university and the demands this will make of them is open to question.

For the purposes of this study, 18 teaching staff have been surveyed in five institutions. The institutions surveyed comprise:

- two state comprehensive schools with sixth forms;
- two independent schools with sixth forms;
- one state sixth form college.

4.2.0 Breakdown of respondents

All numerical data is presented in the form of percentages for ease of comparison.

4.2.1 By institution

Institution type	Sixth form college	State school	Independent school
	22%	56%	22%

Institutions selected for survey were chosen solely on the basis of their institution type, so that a representative sample of the post-16 sector could be established, reflecting the views of teachers and lecturers practising in a variety of circumstances and with varying student bodies. The institutions sampled are also from geographically diverse areas, so responses may also reflect a range of local concerns and circumstances. The primary concern, however, is to establish how a variety of institutional bodies react to a set of core principles and issues surrounding teaching and learning and the management of student transition out of post-16 education into Higher Education.

4.3 Entry qualifications taught

Qualifications taught	English Literature only	English Literature and English Language	English Literature and International Baccalaureate
	67%	22%	11%

4.4 Teaching and learning

Teachers and lecturers were asked to identify, selecting from "Often", "Sometimes" and "Never", the frequency with which a selection of teaching and learning strategies were employed in their teaching sessions. They were also asked to indicate using a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not useful) to 4 (very useful), how beneficial they find each of these teaching and learning strategies in their work with students, providing substantiating comments if they wished.

4.4.1 Reading in advance

This question asked lecturers to consider pre-reading of any description, whether of their set text, theoretical or other contextual material.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	17%	83%	11%	22%	39%	28%

Benefits of pre-reading identified are:

- maximises teaching time;
- establishes expectations of independent study;
- prepares students for lesson activities and discussion;
- maintains pace and momentum through study of set text;
- allows students to identify misunderstandings;
- allows students to formulate individual responses to text.

Some practical issues also emerge:

- the challenge of supporting absentees and weaker students;
- pre-readings are strengthened when supported by specific reading focuses and activities.

Key points:

- The reservations expressed by a sizeable minority of respondents are not grounded in the belief that pre-reading is intrinsically unhelpful, but rather in their experience that students are frequently unreliable and do not complete pre-readings, which in turn affects their preparedness for class and the flow of teaching sessions.
- The views expressed here – both positive and negative – are very similar to those expressed by sixth formers and university lecturers. While the nature and quantity of pre-reading inevitably differs between post-16 and Higher Education sectors, given the different context of study, a set of uniform issues surrounds the use of pre-reading and the experience of teachers and students across sectors in this respect.

4.4.2 Guided reading in groups

This question addressed the use of targeted passage-based reading in teaching sessions, followed up by specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	39%	56%	3%	7%	5%	85%

Typical observations on the benefits of this approach are as follows:

- prompts useful discussion;
- promotes detailed, guided inquiry into text;
- encourages wider engagement;
- encourages students to view text from different perspectives;
- requires students to engage in controlled risk-taking;
- engages students in active but teacher-controlled textual analysis;
- encourages focused discussion;
- collaborative learning and meaning-making;
- structured independent engagement.

The following practical observations also emerge:

- the need to ensure tasks are appropriately consolidated with the whole group afterwards;
- clear activity focus must be shared with students.

Key points:

- Of particular interest here is the value that sixth form teachers place upon “controlled independence”, allowing students to explore text within teacher-controlled parameters – a useful stepping stone on the way to fuller autonomy as it will be experienced in Higher Education contexts.
- Again sixth form teachers' views on this approach and its perceived value are broadly similar to the views expressed by sixth formers and university lecturers.

4.4.3 Reading as a class

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	73%	22%	15%	18%	39%	28%

Advantages teachers identify in this technique are:

- keeps group together during reading;
- easy to maintain and monitor quality of reading;
- in drama texts, helps create sense of being 'audience' rather than 'reader';
- enjoyable shared experience of text;
- discussion of text in process of reading;
- brings texts to life;
- helps troubleshooting language difficulties, especially in pre-twentieth century texts.

There are also a number of practical issues raised:

- recognition that this approach is time-consuming and sometimes time-wasting;
- students can 'drift' during reading;
- is best used in short bursts;
- can become a ready reason for students not to read independently.

Key points:

- This technique is much more regularly used by the sixth form teachers surveyed than by university lecturers, and more highly valued.
- The prevalent use of this approach in post-16 study has clear implications in terms of students' expectations and perceptions of the importance of independent, autonomous study. It may also impact on their abilities independently to approach texts and to overcome difficulties encountered in reading. Reflecting this, a significant proportion of Level 1 students indicate their liking for this approach.
- There is a general view that class reading is an important part of the experience of drama texts and is very useful in dealing with poetry, but less desirable in approaching fiction and other prose texts.

4.4.4 Whole class discussion

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	17%	83%	0%	10%	62%	28%

Advantages identified are:

- facilitates formulation of varied views of the text;
- allows engagement and interaction with others' views of the text;
- allows teacher to control, modify and guide discussion;
- encourages students to test out ideas about the text.

A number of concerns also emerge, however, all of which need to be carefully addressed:

- danger of 'intellectual truancy' by those unwilling or unable to contribute;
- some students dominate discussion;
- this works best when students have been given specific preparation guidelines.

4.4.5 Group/pair discussion

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	28%	72%	5%	5%	17%	73%

Advantages identified are:

- promotes student confidence;
- encourages focus on detail;
- less intimidating forum for discussion;
- useful tool in preparing feedback for whole class;
- allows multiple tasks/facets of text to be covered simultaneously;
- sharing and development of ideas.

Practical issues also emerge:

- requires careful management and monitoring;
- detailed and structured preparation is required to ensure students are aware of focus and outcomes;
- careful organisation of groups increases productivity.

Key points:

- Students entering Higher Education come used to and expecting such interactive approaches to engaging with text.
- The levels of student autonomy and independence (and teacher expectations of these) in setting agendas for discussion and for managing outcomes in such discussions may vary considerably between phases. This is an issue requiring careful consideration.

4.4.6 Close textual analysis

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	17%	83%	5%	0%	22%	73%

Advantages identified are:

- useful for consideration of language;
- learning of analytical skills;
- develops close reading abilities;
- specifically addresses the demands of Assessment Objective 3 for English Literature (see Appendix 2), which requires students to "[s]how detailed understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings" and Assessment Objectives 3 and 4 for English Language and Literature (see Appendix 3).

Difficulties are also observed:

- students often struggle with this;
- needs to be carefully teacher-guided;
- the connections between 'micro' and 'macro' dimensions of the text are essential to understanding, but often difficult for students to master.

Key points:

- Given the levels of independent study required of students of English at university, the development of a solid battery of close reading skills is essential. The value placed upon such skills by post-16 English teachers and their dedicated use of such approaches is a welcome preparation of students for their Higher Education studies.
- Lecturers' views that students are frequently poorly prepared in this area raises questions as to what is understood by the concept of close reading and the requirements of it at each phase. Clearly mutual understanding of what is demanded of students differs in this area of study.

4.4.7 Research using other materials

In this question teachers were asked to consider the extent to which they use literary theory, literary criticism, context material and other literary material as stimulus within their teaching sessions.

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	73%	27%	15%	21%	39%	27%

Advantages are identified:

- opens new ideas;
- provides and develops understanding of context;
- particularly useful for synoptic assessment.

Other observations:

- students frequently find this confusing and have difficulty in applying such materials;
- often used for independent or extension study; students' learning of how to apply and understand such materials is, therefore, curtailed;
- theoretical and critical material is often 'taken as gospel' and uncritically accepted.

Key points:

- Given the prevalence of theory within Higher Education paradigms of English, significant issues emerge here.

- For the large number of students who are evidently not prepared or under-prepared in this key area, the transition to university study of English is problematised.
- Teacher interpretations of what is required under Assessment Objectives 4 and 5 (see Appendix 2) vary widely. In many cases the application of theoretical and critical material is minimal and mechanical, and as such is of questionable value in preparing students for their university studies. For students of English Language and Literature the experience is still more limited, applying only to Assessment Objective 3 (see Appendix 3).
- The particular identification of this approach with the synoptic assessment suggests students are not introduced to such approaches (in detail, at least) until A2, which inevitably limits the extent to which skills in this area can be developed.

4.4.8 Student presentation

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	67%	28%	11%	22%	45%	22%

Advantages identified are:

- students learn to formulate and sustain argument;
- develops student independence and autonomy;
- the pressure of having to present sharpens students' focus on the activity.

Disadvantages noted:

- weaker students struggle and are intimidated;
- presentations are of highly variable quality;

- presentations can be tedious;
- time-consuming.

Practical considerations also emerge:

- the brief/focus for presentation must be very clear to students;
- groupings have to be carefully organised;
- high levels of teacher input are required to make these effective.

4.4.9 Teacher presentation

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
0%	61%	39%	12%	15%	45%	28%

Advantages identified are:

- note-taking skills developed;
- easy method of information-giving;
- students find it reassuring;
- good for contextual/summative elements of lessons.

Other views:

- best used in a limited way;
- preference generally expressed for more interactive, student-centred approaches;
- seen by some as 'the easy option'.

Key points:

- Like Higher Education lecturers, teachers recognise the practical advantages and economies of this approach, but view it with less enthusiasm in pedagogical terms.
- Note-taking skills are recognised as important, but need to be taught.
- Given the prevalence of the lecture forum in Higher Education, students' lack of contact with lecturing and the skills required to maximise learning in this context is a significant issue. To manage the transition to university effectively, students need to be taught to engage with this as a forum for learning, and need to recognise the ways in which the lecture must link to independent study.

4.4.10 Use of Directed Activities Related to Text (DARTs)

In this question teachers were asked to comment on the use of activities such as sequencing, tabulation, cloze (word substitution), prediction exercises, etc. in their teaching sessions. (Lunzer and Gardner, 1979)

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	83%	12%	0%	14%	57%	29%

Advantages identified are:

- specific focus of such activities is beneficial to students;
- all students are engaged;
- variety of learning experience;
- directs attention and reading;
- builds student confidence;
- useful to help students prepare for discussion;
- organisational benefits.

Key points:

- DARTs are regularly employed in the teaching sessions of the vast majority of sixth form students. The relative lack of such activities in teaching at university (and consequently the loss of learning benefits accruing from them) must inevitably impact upon students' learning and their ability to manage the transition to Higher Education.

4.4.11 Audio-visual/ICT stimulus

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	83%	12%	11%	11%	61%	17%

Responses indicate the use of the following stimuli: televisual, overhead projectors, interactive whiteboards. Discussion, however, focuses on televisual stimulus.

Advantages are identified:

- visual properties benefit some students (Gardner, 1983);
- variety of approach creates interest;
- can aid understanding.

Doubts also emerge:

- adds variety but not always depth;
- closes down rather than opens interpretation.

Key points:

- The evidence suggests that in the time-pressured environment of advanced study under Curriculum 2000 the use of such resources and stimuli is more difficult to sustain and that the focus increasingly has to remain more narrowly examination-focused.
- There is no indication of audiovisual stimulus material being seen as a critical, theoretical or ideological interpretation of text.
- Opinions expressed that televisual media closes rather than opens interpretation suggest a confined view of how such texts can be used as critical interpretations to be read alongside the original text.

4.4.12 Drama-based activities

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
5%	78%	17%	5%	18%	42%	35%

Advantages discussed include:

- benefits to kinaesthetic learners (Gardner, 1983);
- variety;
- develops empathy;
- engages students in active, critical reading;
- especially useful with drama texts;
- useful 'way in' to texts of all sorts.

Practical concerns:

- logistical difficulties;
- intimidating for some students;
- learning outcomes and benefits must be clearly established for students.

Key points:

- Although considerably less employed in the post-16 classroom than during GCSE (where drama-based assessment is now an obligatory component of oral assessments), such approaches to text are much more widely employed within the post-16 context than in the university context.
- Given that active learners are likely to benefit greatly from such an approach to textual learning, significant learning opportunities may be missed here.

4.4.13 Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

Frequency			Usefulness			
Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
66%	22%	12%	35%	28%	22%	15%

Positive observations include:

- key benefits accrue in understanding authorial choices, style and craft;
- opportunity to develop personal ideas on a text;
- opportunity to explore alternative issues and interpretations of texts;
- student interaction with text.

Other comments:

- students often unwilling to write in any form;
- lack of time in an over-crowded curriculum (Hodgson and Spours, 2003a)

Key points:

- Given that the study of literature is centrally concerned with acts of creativity, and that the act of reading and the construction of meaning is essentially an act of creation or recreation (Green, 2004), the infrequent use of this approach to learning is both surprising and regrettable.
- The prevalence of comments from teachers that they lack time to adopt such approaches and that they do

not lend themselves to translation into the terms of the QCA Assessment Objectives is a testament to the impact the Curriculum 2000 reforms have had upon teaching post-16. In comments linked to the narrowing of possibilities with the post-16 curriculum under Curriculum 2000, Hodgson and Spours (2003a) note, "...the sheer amount of content to be tackled and assessed has, so far, in our estimation, made Curriculum 2000 a tedious and uninspiring curriculum that encourages instrumentalism and game-playing to maximize qualification outcome rather than experimentation, creativity and preparation for lifelong learning."⁴ The knock-on effect of this in terms of students' abilities to engage with their university studies is self-evident.

- Some teachers are evidently deeply committed to the use of creative and recreative approaches to textual study (such issues as textual transformation are integral in the study of English Language and Literature), finding it one of the most exciting and fulfilling approaches to the study of literature.

⁴ Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., (2003a) *Beyond A Levels: Curriculum 2000 and the Reform of 14-19 Qualifications*, London: Kogan Page, p.109

- Although the use of such approaches is regrettably small in post-16 studies, they are still less employed

in the context of the university departments surveyed in this study.

4.5.0 To what extent do you make your students aware of the QCA Assessment Objectives?

Extent of awareness	1 – unaware	2 – not particularly aware	3 – aware	4 – very aware
	0%	0%	17%	83%

4.6.0 Explain how this has affected the ways in which you set about teaching texts.

Teachers surveyed generally feel that the Assessment Objectives (see Appendices 2 and 3) offer a reasonable set of criteria for the effective assessment of English post-16. They also identify a number of significant ways in which the Assessment Objectives have impacted on the teaching of English under Curriculum 2000:

- focus on the Assessment Objectives leads to teaching to certain aspects of texts rather than the text as a whole;
- Assessment Objectives are used specifically in preparing students for examination and other forms of assessment;
- there has been a narrowing of focus in teaching away from the general and on to what will be examined;
- the grade has become the focus in many respects;
- tasks are 'compartmentalised' by the Assessment Objectives.

A number of salient pejorative observations also emerge from some longer-standing teachers of English. These include that the Assessment Objectives:

- "hedge in the teaching of text";
- "inhibit more daring approaches"
- "create a sense of the text as a system/machine".

Key points:

- While making students aware of the criteria and objectives against which they are to be assessed is clearly good practice, the astonishing fore-grounding of such issues in classrooms throughout secondary education at Key Stage 3, GCSE and under

Curriculum 2000, and in the fascination with league tables, demonstrates the extent to which current paradigms of education are assessment rather than learning driven. It also illustrates a concentration on the quantitative at the expense of the qualitative.

- The narrowing focus on how to achieve in terminal examinations is often undertaken at the expense of genuine personal and life-long gains in terms of personal independence as a learner and breadth of experience.
- Whilst the contents of the Assessment Objectives for English (reproduced in Appendices 2 and 3) are in themselves apparently a good basis for further study and the principles of further study, the narrow application of them to set texts (themselves of an increasingly narrow range) and the extent of teacher input into their achievement, necessarily impacts upon the nature of students' experience of English post-16. Significant differences emerge in the case of the International Baccalaureate, however.
- Allied to the low take-up of Key Skills, a voluntary element of Curriculum 2000 (although attached to financial incentives for further education colleges), such narrow assessment focus has had and continues to have a profound impact on the nature of students entering Higher Education. This is an issue at the heart of Mike Tomlinson's current proposals for the 14-19 curriculum.⁵
- Teachers' clear sense (although not always negative) that the nature of English teaching and assessment post-16 has changed leads to the logical conclusion that the nature of students of English at university has also changed. The lack of movement in university teaching practices, as reflected in the responses in this study, is therefore all the more striking, as is its probable impact on the nature of students' experience on entering university and the likelihood of their easy transition and retention.

⁵ Working Group on 14-19 Reform (2004) *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform: Final Report of the Working Group on 14-19 Reform*, London: Department for Education and Skills.

4.7.0 How effectively do you believe the study of English post-16 prepares students for English at university level?

Opinion here is divided, and many teachers see both advantages and disadvantages in post-16 qualifications as preparation for university English.

The main ways in which it is perceived to be effective preparation are:

- skills in close reading and textual analysis (a view at odds with university lecturers, who find this a weakness in many students);
- the required study of literary criticism and theory as part of advanced study, (a view again at odds with the views of university lecturers, who perceive this as a largely untouched area);
- synoptic papers, with their requirements for comparison and generic study;
- free choice coursework options are seen as broadening;
- the Advanced Extension Award is seen as a good preparation for those intending to take English further;
- study methods of the International Baccalaureate promote independent learning;
- the International Baccalaureate offers a very wide range of texts for study and requires students to undertake extended comparative work.

There are other ways in which it is seen to be less effective:

- narrow range of study does not prepare students for the breadth of study required at degree level;
- slow and painstaking pace of study does not prepare students for the pace of study required at degree level;
- students do not develop sufficient independence as learners;
- lack of extended writing;
- unprepared for quantity of reading.

Key points:

- The majority of these issues are reflected in the concerns expressed by Higher Education lecturers. This suggests a shared awareness of the need to develop more effective methods of managing the transition of interested students into university English. It is clear that a range of criteria other than the Assessment Objectives and examination performance may need to be developed to groom students for effective Higher Education study.
- The purposes of study post-16 need to be reconsidered, particularly in restoring students' perception of the intrinsic value of knowledge. A dislocation from the mentality of assessment is required to assist students in their cognitive development.
- Students must be allowed to explore and take risks – something increasingly brave to allow in the face of mounting grade profiles and their impact on admissions procedures. The recognition that failing is an essential part of learning, perhaps, needs to be recognised. Students must be allowed to try, fail and try again if they are to develop true independence and strengthen as practitioners of English.

4.8.0 What abilities do you believe students need to succeed in the study of English at degree level?

Teachers identify the following abilities as important for success in university English. These appear in no particular order:

- love of reading;
- independence of thought;
- intellectual curiosity;
- analytical skills;
- strong written abilities;
- ability to work independently;
- excitement and enthusiasm;
- an open mind;
- confidence;
- organisational abilities;
- willingness to experiment;

- wide general and literary knowledge;
- research skills;
- application and discipline;
- metacognitive abilities.

Key points:

- This list of abilities bears a strong resemblance to the abilities identified by both sixth formers and lecturers.
- It is striking how this list compares with responses in section 4.7.0 above, where teachers identify the failure of the current post-16 qualifications to address and allow such issues.

4.9.0 What contact (if any) do you have with teachers of English in HE and the methods they employ? How useful would such contact be?

Of the teachers surveyed for this study only 22% recorded any measure of contact with colleagues in Higher Education and a number of these were owing to personal friendships; the remaining 78% have no contact at all. Where contacts exist, this is limited to occasional conferences and visiting lectures.

The majority of respondents (55%) do not feel that contact with HE colleagues would be useful. In most cases this is for unstated reasons, but in a number of cases it is quite forcefully expressed, the teachers in question seeing their only concern at this level being the effective delivery of A level, without any longer view of their obligation to students and their on-going learning. These teachers see the responsibility for managing student transition lies firmly within the universities' court.

Forty-five percent of respondents in this survey felt further contact with university colleagues would be beneficial. The reasons given were as follows:

- to establish expectations of study at university;
- to develop mutual understanding between sectors;
- desire to promote the further study of English with students;
- to develop shared practice where possible;
- to enter into discussion of practice;
- to help prepare students better for their on-going study of English.

It could be argued that effective transition preparation needs to begin as soon as a student decides on the continued study of English (or even the possibility of such continued study). Therefore the development of tighter contact between the post-16 and Higher Education sectors is essential.

4.10.0 What programmes (if any) does your school/college have in place to assist students in making the transition to university study?

With one notable exception, such programmes, where they exist at all, tend to be of a very limited nature. A number of respondents identify generic university guidance sessions as part of the sixth form pastoral curriculum, visiting lectures from university tutors, student attendance at university Open Days and UCAS mentoring. The only subject specific preparation undertaken within the departments surveyed is extra guidance sessions for students undertaking the Advanced Extension Award.

One example of more structured preparation emerges from the survey, and this not on a subject but rather on a generic basis, and comes from a department which actively encouraged its students to attend a Higher Education course run by the local university.

5. Lecturers' Perspective

5.1.0 Introduction

As the primary academic and personal contact for first year undergraduates, lecturers work at the juncture of Advanced study (be it Advanced GCE, International Baccalaureate, Access or other entry routes) and undergraduate study.

For the purposes of this study, 21 teaching staff have been surveyed in five institutions. The institutions surveyed comprise:

- two pre-1992 universities;
- two post-1992 universities;
- one university college.

5.2.0 Breakdown of respondents

All numerical data is presented in the form of percentages for ease of comparison.

5.2.1 By institution type

Institutions selected for survey were chosen solely on the basis of their institution type, so that a representative sample of the Higher Education sector could be established, reflecting the views of lecturers practising in a variety of circumstances and with varying student bodies. The institutions sampled are also from geographically diverse areas, so responses may also reflect a range of local concerns and circumstances. The primary concern, however, is to establish how a variety of institutional bodies react to a set of core principles and issues surrounding teaching and learning and the management of student transition, a matter of paramount concern to all Higher Education institutions.

	Pre-1992	Post-1992	University College/Higher Education College
Advanced GCE English Literature	✓	✓	✓
Advanced GCE English Language and Literature	✓	✓	✓
International Baccalaureate	✓	✓	✓
Access		✓	✓
GNVQ*		✓	✓
Other#		✓	✓

5.3.0 Entry qualifications accepted

* Specific GNVQs respondents stated accepting as entry qualifications are:

- English/Communication;
- Performing Arts.

Other entry qualifications respondents stated accepting are:

- relevant international qualifications;
- mature students without formal qualifications, tested for relevant abilities.

Key observations:

- It is interesting to note the wider range of qualifications accepted by both post-1992 and university college respondents. This brings into question the full impact of the National Qualifications Framework. It appears that the notion of parity between qualifications routes is not endorsed across the whole Higher Education community. This would tend to confirm the views of Hodgson and Spours (2003a), who identify pre-1992 institutions as “selectors” and post-1992 institutions, university colleges and higher education colleges as “recruiters”. It may also indicate the largely pragmatic response of the Higher Education community to the voluntarist nature of reform under Curriculum 2000 (Hodgson and Spours, 2003a) and the impact (or lack of impact) the reforms have had on admissions policy. Some institutions are still largely able to maintain the status quo, whilst others have been moved inevitably towards wider admissions policies in order to meet targets.
- The 1997 New Labour policy shift from increasing to widening participation is also significant here. The specific agendas and potential changes this imposes upon the Higher Education sector are great. Hodgson and Spours identify that “[t]he increase in participation in full-time post-compulsory education has led to more diverse groups of learners and, in many cases, a growth in class sizes.”⁶ Such changes in the post-16 classroom are a good indicator of the likely future of the Higher Education teaching context and point out the need for the Higher Education community to consider how it will seek to incorporate the widening body of students, their individual experiences and individual needs into the university department. The impact on both access needs and assessment outcomes is likely to be profound.

6. Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., (2003a) *Beyond A Levels: Curriculum 2000 and the Reform of 14-19 Qualifications*, London: Kogan Page, p.9

5.4.0 Teaching and learning

Lecturers were asked to identify, selecting from "Often", "Sometimes" and "Never", the frequency with which a selection of teaching and learning strategies were employed in their teaching sessions, identifying as appropriate lecture and/or seminar context. They were

also asked to indicate using a Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (not useful) to 4 (very useful), how beneficial they find each of these teaching and learning strategies in their work with students, providing substantiating comments if they wished.

5.4.1 Student advance reading

This question asked lecturers to consider pre-reading of any description, whether of their set text, theoretical or other contextual material.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	0%	25%	75%	0%	15%	55%	30%
Seminar	0%	0%	100%	0%	15%	45%	40%

Response to this question demonstrates that pre-reading is frequently adopted in both the lecture and the seminar context. The large majority of respondents rely upon it to a large extent. Typical observations are as follows:

- secures basic textual knowledge before teaching;
- allows students opportunities to formulate their own initial responses;

- maximises contact time;
- ensures most students are prepared for the session.

A number of respondents, however, identified the obvious problems arising when pre-reading has not been done by students.

5.4.2 Guided reading tasks in groups

This question addressed the use of targeted passage-based reading in teaching sessions, followed up by specified group discussion, question response, analytical or written outcomes.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	40%	40%	20%	30%	0%	45%	25%
Seminar	0%	35%	65%	0%	0%	60%	40%

This is a technique used considerably less frequently in the lecture than in the seminar, owing, no doubt, to the logistical difficulties of managing such activities in the large group context. There is a strong perception that this is a useful or very useful technique.

A number of distinct advantages to this approach are identified:

- builds student confidence;
- encourages tight focus on directed tasks;

- secures contribution and participation from a wider range of students.

The following practical observations are also made:

- groups must be carefully overseen – implying the dangers of lack of focus and irrelevance;
- tasks require detailed preparation to ensure clarity of learning and to maximise group autonomy.

5.4.3 Reading as a class

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	55%	30%	15%	35%	20%	45%	0%
Seminar	20%	55%	25%	10%	40%	50%	0%

This is not a frequently employed approach in either lectures or seminars, which is not surprising, given the prevalence of pre-reading tasks. There is a stated feeling from some respondents that this is “beneath” Higher Education and that there is a high likelihood of losing students’ attention. Many respondents consider this approach of no or little use. Within the Higher Education system, where students are expected to display far greater autonomy and independence, such expectations and views are understandable. Faced with students who have failed

to undertake required pre-reading, however, some respondents suggest that this approach can salvage a teaching session. Reading as a class is not ideal, but “better than a disaster”.

Some advantages are also observed:

- can assist in pacing students through a teaching session or a sequence of tasks;
- specific uses are identified in the context of teaching drama texts.

5.4.4 Whole class discussion

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Seminar	0%	20%	80%	10%	5%	60%	25%

This is a regularly employed approach within seminar teaching, where the smaller group context makes it viable. Most respondents consider this approach to be either useful or very useful. A number of specific advantages are identified:

- builds group cohesion and morale;
- provides an open forum for students to share, explore and develop ideas;
- offers the opportunity for instant feedback and debate.

Disadvantages identified are:

- not all students are prepared to contribute;
- creates significant anxiety in some students.

5.4.5 Group/pair discussion

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	35%	35%	30%	35%	0%	20%	45%
Seminar	0%	10%	90%	0%	5%	35%	60%

This is a technique infrequently employed in lectures, even though it is a relatively manageable means of securing student interaction with learning within that context. It is much more widely employed in the seminar context.

Specific advantages include:

- all students are given a chance to participate;
- more reticent students are much more likely to become actively involved.

A number of practical issues are also identified:

- needs close monitoring to ensure focus and relevance;
- requires the setting of very precise targets;
- students require explanation of the function of the discussion.

5.4.6 Close textual analysis

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	10%	75%	15%	10%	0%	50%	40%
Seminar	0%	10%	90%	0%	0%	55%	45%

More often employed in seminars than in lectures, this is, nevertheless, an approach widely used and considered useful or very useful by most respondents. A number identify students' generally poor abilities in this area and unwillingness to involve themselves in the discussion of textual detail, preferring to maintain argument on the level

of the general. This carries important messages for aiding student development; students must be actively encouraged to engage with the close details of text and learn how to use such detail to enlighten broader questions and discussion.

5.4.7 Approaches to text using other materials

In this question lecturers were asked to consider the extent to which they use literary theory, literary criticism, context material and other literary material as stimulus within their teaching sessions.

This is a widely employed and highly valued approach in both lectures and seminars. There is a general feeling that this is, to quote one respondent, "what English at HE is all about".

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	5%	10%	85%	0%	5%	70%	25%
Seminar	0%	20%	80%	0%	15%	60%	25%

Key points:

- The extent to which students entering Higher Education have actually been prepared for this is deeply open to question. Such issues seem to be addressed within the QCA's Assessment Objectives for English. Advanced GCE students of English Literature are required in Assessment Objective 4 (see Appendix 2) to "articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers" and in Assessment Objective 5 to "show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood and evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study" (see Appendix 2). However, the extent to which they are engaged in any meaningful application of such theoretical and contextual material (even

within the synoptic papers, where such issues are directly addressed) is much more open to question, and the uptake of the Advanced Extension Award, a test which requires abilities far closer to university-style response, has been notoriously low (1492 entrants in 2004; 1341 in 2003 according to the Joint Council for General Qualifications).

- Other respondents identify that contextual approaches often provide useful ways in to apparently difficult texts.
- There is general agreement that students struggle with the theoretical nature of Higher Education study. Students need to be taught how to use such approaches and materials. The extent to which first year students find difficulty in this area bears testimony to a lack of preparation (or at least a different understanding of what it constitutes) in English post-16.

5.4.8 Student presentation

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	80%	20%	0%	60%	15%	20%	5%
Seminar	5%	80%	15%	0%	35%	50%	15%

Only rarely used in lectures, these are more frequently employed within seminars. The majority of respondents feel it to be a useful approach, but reservations abound. The following comments are typical:

- “of varying quality and usefulness”;
- “good ones are fine, but too many aren’t good”.

Other comments indicate that many students dislike the processes of preparing and delivering presentations to their lecturers and peers, although the quality of presentations markedly improves when they are formally assessed.

Both teachers and students in post-16 education express similar views. Perhaps significant here is the lack of formality in the use of presentations. Students following conventional Advanced GCE courses – the traditional university entrant – have not, since their GCSEs, been formally orally assessed, and without the extrinsic motivation such assessment inevitably applies, many do not apply and develop these skills. Different in this respect is the International Baccalaureate, in the course of which students are required to undertake formal oral assessment to the extent of 30% of their final grade, covering a minimum of three assessment activities.

5.4.9 Lecturer presentation

Clearly the lecture is a useful tool in terms of economies of scale and in logistical terms. Most of the lecturers surveyed see the lecture as a useful teaching approach, but also recognise its limitations, not least in that it offers much more limited opportunities for student interaction and involvement. Significantly, but perhaps not surprisingly, this is contrary to the views of a significant number of students (and sixth form students) who hold on to the security (and anonymity) of the lecture.

	Usefulness (%)			
	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	10	0	80	10
Seminar	10	0	80	10

5.4.10 Use of Directed Activities Related to Texts (DARTs)

In this question lecturers were asked to comment on the use of activities such as sequencing, tabulation, cloze (word substitution), prediction exercises, etc. in their teaching sessions. (Lunzer & Gardner, 1979)

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	75%	15%	10%	15%	0%	50%	35%
Seminar	60%	30%	10%	10%	0%	65%	25%

This is a largely unused technique, although it should be noted that a large number of sixth form students (61% of those surveyed) observed that such techniques are either useful or very useful in aiding their learning. The general lack of substantiating comments from respondents in this section suggests that the use of such activities and their potential benefits is little understood.

Given the prevalence of pre-reading tasks in university English, exploration of how DARTs can be used to support and enhance the students' reading experience and initial recording of their findings may well be advantageous. Where such pre-recording and activity reading has been undertaken, perceptible benefits may become evident in terms of student confidence and willingness to participate in teaching sessions. The intention is not that such activities should be content-prescriptive, but that they should offer support in independent learning and reading during the early stages of undergraduate study.

5.4.11 Audio-visual stimulus

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	5%	15%	80%	0%	10%	40%	50%
Seminar	5%	60%	35%	5%	10%	43%	42%

According to the vast majority of respondents, such approaches are sometimes or often employed in both lectures and seminars. Not surprisingly, there is also general agreement in terms of their usefulness, the vast majority again identifying that they are useful or very useful.

A range of stimuli is identified:

- PowerPoint – used for quotations, images; also provides a useful means of “signposting” lectures and guiding note-taking;
- websites;
- televisual resources – usually used in extracts; careful explanation of relevance required;
- audio resources – the nature of these is not specified by respondents.

5.4.12 Drama-based activities

In this question lecturers were asked to comment on the use of activities such as hot-seating, role-play, character monologues, staging exercises and improvisation in their teaching sessions.

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	75%	25%	0%	15%	45%	30%	10%
Seminar	50%	50%	0%	10%	50%	30%	10%

More often used in seminars than in lectures, for obvious reasons, this is still not a widely employed approach, although 40% of respondents believe it to be a useful or very useful technique. There is a general theme of student reticence and unwillingness to participate running through

responses, which may account in part for the low usage of such techniques. It is open to question whether, given fuller explanation of its benefits to learning and greater familiarity, students may be more willing to engage in drama-based approaches.

5.4.13 Creative, recreative and free writing responses to text

	Frequency			Usefulness			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	1 not useful	2	3	4 very useful
Lecture	75%	15%	10%	100%	0%	0%	0%
Seminar	45%	45%	10%	90%	10%	0%	0%

More frequently used in seminars than in lectures, such approaches are even less frequently employed than drama-based techniques.

A number of respondents offer cautious support for the approach. Typical comments are:

- "rewriting exercises can be useful";
- "engages students well – helps them to see structure of text from inside and improves critical faculties".

There is a general sense, however, that such techniques should not be over-used and that great care must always be taken to link the activity specifically to desired learning so that students are aware of the benefits of the activity.

Key points:

- Given the increasing provision of Creative Writing courses within university departments, it is perhaps surprising that this is not a more widely exploited set of approaches.
- Creative and recreative tasks are integral to the study of English Language and Literature (see Assessment Objective 6, Appendix 3).

5.5.0 To what extent has your teaching at Level 1 changed since the introduction of Curriculum 2000?

Lecturers were asked to indicate their response on a four point Likert Scale, ranging from 1 (no change) to 4 (considerable change). They were also asked, where they have changed their approaches to teaching, to offer an explanation of the ways in which this has been manifested.

Extent of change	1	2	3	4
	53%	41%	6%	0%

Given the large and growing body of evidence suggesting Higher Education's uncomfortable relationship with Curriculum 2000 (Hodgson & Spours, 2003a and 2003b; Knights, 2004; Working Group on 14-19 Reform, 2004; evidence from respondents in this survey) and a growing dissatisfaction with the quality of entrants with Advanced GCE qualifications, it is surprising to note that in the large

majority of cases respondents state that there has been little or no change in their approaches to teaching. This leads to a number of potential conclusions:

- the quality of students entering Higher Education English has not in fact changed as significantly as recent media coverage and departmental views suggest;
- the gap between post-16 and Higher Education paradigms of English that many lecturers believe exists is in fact not as marked as it may appear;
- a large number of lecturers continue to teach in their old ways in spite of the shifting needs of students;
- faced with a significant change in the nature of the student body and the needs attendant upon this, lecturers have found themselves uncertain of how to deal with the new demands they face.

What is certain is that if the research and the concerns of a large number of highly experienced professionals are to be credited, serious action in the form of developing new and appropriate pedagogic approaches is essential if students in university English departments are successfully to manage the transition into Higher Education. This has serious implications in terms of retention as well as in terms of assisting students to continue in their academic development. The pressing nature of this need is augmented by the widening participation agenda, which can only serve to increase the scale and complexity of this problem.

In their research into early university experience in Australian universities, McInnis and James (1995) point out that gaps do not only exist between the school or college and the university, but that there are also gulfs between students and academics. In the British context, as the nature of students and the nature of student learning under Curriculum 2000 has changed, so university lecturers need to ensure that their teaching is modified. This does not mean that the content taught needs to change or that students should be patronised by the "dumbing down" of courses, it is simply to indicate the pressing imperative for individual lecturers and departments to consider their pedagogical aims and rationales in order to assure student progression rather than student difficulties and possibly alienation. A careful consideration of how a range of new and perhaps unfamiliar teaching tools can be applied to support and develop student independence is incumbent upon university departments in order to maximise students' early success and to improve transition.

5.6.0 Do you believe students' academic grades have been improved by the new prevailing system of assessment post-16?

Have grades improved?	Yes	No	Unsure
	12%	65%	23%

Key points:

- End-users of Advanced qualifications, including the Higher Education community, continue to express their concerns that Advanced GCE grades no longer provide an adequate and useful guide to student

ability. This continues to be an area of educational policy review, as most recently evidenced in Mike Tomlinson's enquiry into the Advanced GCE results of 2002 and in his more recent proposals to divide the A Grade into four categories to assist in the differentiation of candidates. Improvement in grade, therefore, is no reliable indicator of student ability and fitness for HE study.

- What is certain is that the current Advanced GCE and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education system runs on a heavily assessment-driven model (Hodgson and Spours, 2003a; Working Group on 14-19 Reform 2004), focussing more on attainment than on learning.
- Added to this is the problem of grade inflation as a result of module retakes, which can frequently provide a misleading impression of a candidate's true ability. When we then consider the concern that paradigms of English in the post-16 and Higher Education sectors differ significantly (and that students entering Higher Education therefore need to be all the more well prepared and adept in their subject knowledge and skills), we see the grounds for concern deepening still further.
- Given the Higher Education community's lack of involvement in its inception and development, the pragmatic approach the large majority of departments have taken in responding to the voluntarist reforms of Curriculum 2000 is understandable (Hodgson and Spours, 2003a). Faced with a post-16 system in which they are significant stakeholders, but into which they have had little or no input, university departments have to continue to adapt to the changing support needs of students.
- In this respect, the findings of the English Subject Centre's report by Gawthroppe and Martin (2003) are significant. This report identifies that, whilst 43% of departments recorded an increasing student A level grade profile, they also lamented 'a marked drop in the standard of written English and in the range of reading'. Still more interestingly, in spite of such an apparent contradiction, 92% of the departments in the survey identified examination performance as the principle criterion by which they select students and none have adopted alternative selection criteria beyond the UCAS form and interviews.

5.7.0 Do you believe the nature of teaching and assessment post-16 has broadened or limited students' academic abilities? Please explain.

Responses to this question fall into two categories. Some respondents are unwilling to commit themselves, whilst others are certain that the academic abilities of their students are more limited as a result of study under Curriculum 2000. No respondents believe that academic abilities have been improved by the new curriculum.

Typical observations are:

- students have been taught to the text;
- over-reliance on taking and recycling notes;
- decline in analytical abilities;
- decline in writing abilities;
- difficulties coping with pace of study;
- less experience in independent reading;
- problems with plagiarism from websites;
- students drilled in an assessment-driven system – choices of module often based on assessment method, not content;
- students regard education as a series of “assessment hoops” rather than a process of learning;
- less imaginative;
- less secure in transferable study skills;
- less willing to undertake wider reading.

It is clear from this that there is a core of concern within university English departments that students are emerging from post-16 English with a changed set of perceptions and expectations, as well as a more limited repertoire of essential transferable study skills.

A number of respondents identify that these problems are much less marked in mature applicants than in traditional under-20 applicants.

Key points:

- The intention of Curriculum 2000 reform to broaden the post-16 curriculum and consequently the breadth of student knowledge has been of limited success. This is partly due to the content-heavy, assessment-ridden nature of the modular system in place, but also the result of Higher Education's continued use of the traditional “three good A Levels” as the main (if not only) criterion for admission, which has encouraged students to maintain the traditional narrow focus in their post-16 education. Thus the problematic relationship between Higher Education and Curriculum 2000 has been exacerbated – wanting students with a wider range of knowledge and abilities, university admissions policies have nevertheless tended to reinforce in applicants the need to remain narrowly focussed within an increasingly prescriptive and narrow Advanced level curriculum.
- Hodgson and Spours (2003a) offer a verdict that reflects the concerns of university departments, concluding, “the legacy of the first two years of Curriculum 2000 has been one of ‘quantitative gains’ but qualitative losses in advanced level learner programmes.”⁷ This also confirms the views of departments as expressed in Gawthrop and Martin's report (2003), where a steady rise in student grade profile is counterbalanced by a decline in perceived academic ability.
- The general nature of the Advanced GCE qualification needs to be considered. Although still the most popular corpus of subjects at Advanced level, the majority of students studying English at this level will not pursue it to degree level, and as such the subject has to meet a wider set of needs. The further sub-division of subject specifications into AS and A2, as linked but free-standing qualifications, and the widening participation agenda may well have served to exacerbate this problem. Advanced qualifications are catering to a wider cohort of students, including fourth and in some cases fifth subject students, whose reasons for studying and approaches to studying the subject are significantly different to those of potential university applicants.

7. Hodgson, A. and Spours, K., (2003a) *Beyond A Levels: Curriculum 2000 and the Reform of 14-19 Qualifications*, London: Kogan Page, p.53

5.8.0 What abilities do you believe students need to succeed in the study of English at degree level?

The qualities identified by respondents, in no particular order, are as follows:

- application;
- organisation;
- intellectual curiosity;
- an open mind;
- advanced reading and writing skills;
- sensitivity in interpretation;
- enthusiasm and enjoyment;
- commitment in reading and willingness to read widely;
- note-taking skills;
- critical thinking;
- research skills;
- a grasp of key theoretical approaches;
- imagination.

This list of qualities demonstrates a very striking similarity to the list of qualities sixth formers themselves believe are essential to successful study of English at degree level.

The fact that lecturers have such concerns about the performance of their students suggests they believe students en masse do not demonstrate such qualities. This creates a worrying situation where if students share lecturers' understanding of what is required, but are failing adequately to demonstrate such qualities in their undergraduate work, then a serious gap of understanding or expectation emerges. Such issues clearly need to be identified and addressed specifically early in university programmes if effective transition is to be achieved through a mutual understanding of expectations and requirements.

5.9.0 What contact (if any) do you have with teachers of English in school and further education and the methods they employ? How useful would such contact be?

Respondents indicate contact with school and college English teachers in the following ways:

- shared sixth form/university events;
- teachers undertaking postgraduate courses of study;
- speaking in schools;
- Higher Education "taster" days;
- conferences;
- liaison with partner further education colleges – shared modules.

Most respondents express the desire (or at least recognise the need) for more formal and regular contact with school and further education colleagues, so that issues of policy, practice and perceptions of what constitutes English study can be discussed.

A minority of respondents, because of already heavy demands on their time, are resistant to the idea of greater dialogue with school and college colleagues.

Key points:

- If effective management of transition to university study is to occur, it has to begin at the earliest possible stage during post-16 study. Students confident of their wish to undertake higher study of English (and even those who think they may wish to do so) must be made aware early of what they are preparing themselves for. Such students need to be moved beyond the view that their Advanced study is an end in itself, but is a stage in the management and progression of their learning. University and schoolteachers clearly both need to be actively involved in developing programmes to facilitate this.
- The most recent report of the Tomlinson's Working Group on 14-19 Reform indicates the desire for end-users, including the Higher Education community, to be actively involved in the development of Advanced Diplomas. They also suggest the possibility of high-flying Advanced

students, where appropriate, “drawing down” HE materials for study as part of their Advanced diploma. The logistics of such an arrangement are mind-boggling, but clearly would require a fuller and more formal relationship between teachers in schools, further and higher education.

- If university departments are serious in their concerns about the quality of their entrants they must become proactively involved in managing the ways students prepare themselves for degree level study. Reaction to need at the point of entry, while clearly better than nothing, encourages a deficit model of transition management.
- In spite of the increasingly “marketised” nature of the Higher Education sector and the concomitant competition this inevitably creates between and even within institutions, the need for a concerted approach to establishing closer contact between Higher Education and the post-16 sector is essential.

5.10.0 What programmes (if any) does your university have in place to assist students in making the transition to the study of English at degree level?

The following programmes and approaches to managing student transition are identified:

- induction week for new students;
- “bridging” summer schools for mature entrants;
- mentoring programmes;
- academic support units;
- teaching, learning and assessment centres;
- study skills programmes (Durkin & Main, 2002);
- academic guidance lectures;
- higher contact hours in first year;
- academic/personal tutors;
- cross-phase local initiative with further education colleges and schools (one respondent only).

From the approaches and programmes listed above, it is apparent that university departments are seeking to address how effectively to manage the issue of transition for their students. With one notable exception, what is equally apparent is that these are largely internal and are inevitably in a sense reactive. If, as argued, the transition to university begins at the point a sixth form student decides s/he may wish to pursue the study of English at university this a limited and potentially limiting response. Proactive involvement across phases needs increasingly to be a part of universities’ (and, of course, schools’ and colleges’) work. As Gillian Ballinger notes:

*First-year students’ needs are heterogeneous, and an awareness and understanding of their educational backgrounds prior to degree highlights the absolute necessity of being sensitive to the transitional process.*⁸

In order for this proliferation of needs to be met effectively both sectors must consider how meaningful transference of skills and content can be established. Furthermore, where paradigmatic, epistemological and syntagmatic differences in versions of English (and pedagogical approaches in their delivery) exist between phases, deeper and mutual consideration of how students can be assisted in managing the change needs to be developed. The linking of school or college and higher education needs to become not a politically correct nod towards notions of widening participation, but an active and committed partnership – perhaps including teaching “up and down” - to ensure that students’ experiences of studying at both phases are enriched and supported and that they are thus enabled to succeed in making the leap into Higher Education.

8. Ballinger, G.J. (2003) “Bridging the gap between A level and degree: some observations on managing the transitional stage in the study of English Literature” *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education*, 2 (1):103.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1.0 Reading

Reading is a key issue in the management of the transition to university English. It is vital that schools, colleges and universities recognise where differences in this area can be identified and take steps to integrate the nature and requirements of reading at each level as far as possible. Keverne Smith observes a significant divergence in praxis and requirement on this issue:

It is apparent that the abrupt change from limited intensive reading pre-higher education to wide-ranging, extensive, contextualised reading in higher education is a major stumbling block for a significant number of students. (Smith, 2004: 91) ⁹

For effective transition to be managed it is essential that potential degree level students are prepared for the demands of university-type reading before entering on their higher courses of study. If, in expressing their love of reading, as most students entering degree level English study do, the exercise to which they refer is essentially different to the activity university courses demand of them, this is indeed a deep problem.

6.2.0 Risk-taking

Students need to be allowed to learn skills of interpretation and to learn to experiment with ideas. Such experimentation inevitably involves mistakes, shortcomings, even failures. If students are to learn effectively and to engage with the skills required of higher English study, they must be allowed the luxury of trying and failing with appropriate formative support in place to allow them to develop through the experience. This is a luxury increasingly absent from the world of AS and A2 level study with its time-pressures, highly explicit (arguably limiting) assessment demands and instrumentalism.

6.3.0 Transition programmes

Whilst all departments in the survey identify the presence of transition programmes and study skills programmes (some of which are subject specific), there seems to be a distinct need for more formal transition programmes which are proactively rather than reactively aligned. Any deficit model of transition is clearly less likely to succeed than a model which prepares students prior to their arrival

in the university. The interim proposals of the Tomlinson's Working Group on 14-19 Reform point tantalisingly towards shared interest in the development of individualised student programmes, but there is much interesting work to be done with education specialists who bridge the gap between post-16 and university English in the establishment of programmes to prepare students for Higher Education which will also enhance their engagement with and performance in post-16 qualifications.

6.4.0 Expectations

Lowe and Cook, in their study of a first-year group at Ulster University, identify that "about one-third of the cohort appear to expect teaching styles associated with school" ¹⁰ This is only natural. However, the advancement of cognitive ability and thinking is a spiral sequence of learning followed by developmental unlearning in order to make way for the next stage of development, which is latent within the previous phase. So students intending to pursue English at degree level need to be introduced as early as possible (arguably while they are still undertaking their post-16 studies) to the nature of the study they will be expected to undertake.

Common sense dictates that transition will be easiest where assumptions and rationales about the nature of the subject and its delivery are shared. Where such shared expectations are not in existence, however, transparency of expectation, at the very least, is necessary to enable students to make the necessary cognitive and metacognitive adjustments.

A striking feature of this survey is the extent to which teachers and students at both phases seem to agree upon what is required in the successful study of English at degree level. It soon becomes clear, however, that this apparent coalescence of views masks and perhaps perpetuates misunderstanding. There is a shared view of the issues that are central to success in the successful study of English at university, but what actually constitutes satisfactory performance in each of these areas and how each area is defined is a far more elusive and problematic issue. The coincidence of vocabulary creates a sense of shared values and perceptions which masks widely divergent views.

9. Smith, K. (2004) "School to University: An investigation into the experience of first-year students of English at British universities" *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 3 (1): 91.

10. Lowe, H. and Cook, A. "Mind the Gap: are students prepared for Higher Education", *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, Vol. 27, No. 1; 63.

6.5.0 Teaching and learning

The evidence arising from this survey suggests a significant difference between approaches to teaching and learning in the contexts of schools and colleges and Higher Education institutions. The range of techniques employed within the post-16 context is both wider and more supportive of a variety of learners and their learning styles. The predominance of the lecture and seminar format, both of which tend to operate with much larger groups than are ever experienced during post-16 education, are formats unfamiliar and threatening to many students, students who are already insecure in the face of significant expectations of independence. The requirement to use material presented in the lecture forum and in large seminar groups as a basis for independent thinking and study and in a frequently less structured way is a new demand for the majority of students entering Higher Education, a factor exacerbated by the assessment-driven demands of AS and A2 examinations courses.

The nature of teaching and learning and consequently the experience of students of post-16 English has changed radically under the auspices of Curriculum 2000, but, on the evidence of this survey, practice within university departments has not moved in light of this. Students entering university English courses come with expertise and skills and also deficits and support needs that must be addressed. Students, if they are successfully to be trained in the requirements of higher English study must be met where they arrive in terms of subject knowledge and subject skills and these must be tailored and built upon to ensure both retention and student development.

6.6.0 Shared responsibility

Successful management of transition is not, cannot and should not be the responsibility of any single group. This report has been structured around the principle that transition is a multi-faceted issue and involves a number of stakeholder groups. Unless these groups are actively encouraged to work together, along with parents, carers and politicians, the issue of managing transition, especially in the context of the widening participation agenda of the current government, will continue to become more and more troublesome.

6.7.0 Transition does not begin at university

It is the contention of the author that if transition is to be managed most effectively, a realignment of view and practice is necessary. Transition does not begin at the point when a student moves from school or college to university, but rather at the point when that student makes the decision to pursue higher English studies (or even begins to consider it). Whilst this process would be difficult to manage, schools, colleges and Higher Education must work together to identify such students as early as possible and look to prepare them for university study. This should be undertaken through their Advanced level studies to introduce them to the conceptual and paradigmatic concerns of Higher Education English and to extend and enhance their experience of post-16 study.

The establishment of cross-phase working groups and the creation of academic posts dedicated to teaching "up and down" to facilitate good transitional practice is essential. There is a pressing need to build up effective programmes of study (both skills- and content-based) that can meet the needs of schools, colleges, universities and the students.

Appendices

Appendix I: Transition from English at A level to English at degree level

Adrian Barlow

(OCR Chair of Examiners in English 1997-2004)

There has always been a tension between English as taught in schools post-GCSE and the English courses encountered by students when they arrive to begin their degree. Before 1993, when the overwhelming majority of students studied English Literature (just called 'English') for A level, the tension was between the detailed study of individual texts at school and the much broader scope of literary study encountered at university. It is fair to say that, before the 1990s, the influence of literary theory had had little direct impact on A level English examining. Very broadly, the key criteria for A level success were a) knowing the texts in detail b) producing an "informed personal response" – though the questions of how "informed" should be understood and what was meant by "personal" were usually begged – and c) writing with fluency and accuracy. The quality of work produced by strong candidates was often very high, but "flair" was best demonstrated through unseen practical criticism, sometimes relegated to S 'special' papers taken only by a tiny minority of candidates. Wider reading, contextual and critical study certainly formed a large part of the teaching, though rarely in the examining, of English. In part this was due to the fact that all assessment took place at the end of two years: modular assessment and AS levels had not yet been introduced, and many teachers felt able to devote a good part of the course to an introduction to the study of Literature. This introduction often included an historical outline.

At the same time, *English Language* A level was beginning to be offered by some examining boards, but taken by only a small minority of A level English candidates. Teachers with the qualifications to teach specific Language courses were relatively rare, most having themselves taken literature-based degrees before entering teaching. More popular was the introduction of combined *English Language and Literature* courses, where candidates typically took a combination of Literature and Language papers. Such courses had the advantage that they could be taught jointly with conventional Literature and/or Language classes. Initially, therefore, they were more popular in the tertiary sector, which usually had greater flexibility in staffing and timetabling. It is fair to say that the emphasis in the Language papers was more generally socio-linguistic than based on any systematic approach to frameworks for the study of language.

It is important to add that during the 1990s the popularity of English at A level appeared to decline markedly, often to the benefit of subjects such as Psychology and Media Studies. The main victim was *English Literature*, while *English Language* and *English Language and Literature* remained steady or made a slight advance:

	Lit.	Lang.	Lang-Lit.	Total
1997	61979	14006	19238	95223
2000	53763	14138	18661	86562*

* Data extracted from *Inter-Board Statistics*, compiled annually by AQA

The introduction of Curriculum 2000 (September 2000 onwards) radically changed this pattern. The introduction of compulsory AS (Advanced Subsidiary) representing half of the A level course, with AS set at a standard half way between GCSE and A level, meant three things. First, the burden of assessment was dramatically increased: students now had to take three units in the first half of their A level course, and this put immediate pressure on teaching time, with many English departments complaining that they could no longer offer the type of introductory course that they had regarded as essential in the past. Second, the remaining three units had to embody the more demanding elements of A level to balance the easier level of AS work. At both AS and A2, however, English Literature courses now placed much greater emphasis on contextual study, which had scarcely featured at all in the so-called legacy syllabuses.

The third, and equally significant, change was the introduction of synoptic assessment, a final unit of the course which would draw together the knowledge, skills and understanding acquired over the course as a whole. In English specifications (as syllabuses are now called) this innovation has had the beneficial effect of requiring teachers to teach and students to learn techniques and approaches to literary and language study that go some way to bridging the gap between A level and degree level work in English studies. Work for this unit typically involves studying and comparing a range of texts or textual material and invites a range of literary and/or linguistic discussion, sometimes from a theoretical perspective.

The course content of each English subject, and the skills to be taught and assessed, are now prescribed in Subject Criteria documents drawn up by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). QCA produced separate Criteria for *English Literature*, *English Language*

and *English Language and Literature*, each with its own subject content and assessment objectives. This effectively removed the flexibility that had previously been enjoyed by schools and colleges to combine Literature and Language teaching, so that students could combine elements of both syllabuses into *English Language and Literature*. Whereas it had been hoped and expected that this subject would grow rapidly in popularity and hasten the integration of literary and language approaches to English studies, the opposite has happened. In 2003, the take-up of the three separate subjects was as follows:

	Lit.	Lang.	Lang-Lit.	Total
2003	50082	14971	14694	79774*

* Data extracted from *Inter-Board Statistics*. (It may also be noted that between 1997 and 2003, the proportion of male candidates taking English subjects has continued to drop. By 2003, 70% of all candidates were female, and 70% of all candidates achieving grade A at A level in English were also female. This clearly has significant implications for future recruitment to university English departments and, in the medium term, for the profile of English teachers in secondary schools and colleges.)

The most significant change of emphasis in *English Literature* for Curriculum 2000 was a much increased weighting given to contextual study. Indeed, the requirement that, at A2, students should be able to "evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study" (Assessment Objective 5ii; *Subject Criteria for English Literature*, QCA 1999) goes well beyond what the QAA *Benchmarking Statements for English* (2000) expect: these call only for "awareness [not evaluation] of how different social and cultural contexts affect the nature of language and meaning" (3.2: *Key subject-specific skills*).

It is important to realize, also, that students arriving at university will have had very different experiences of English at A level. Students studying *English Literature* will have studied a minimum of eight texts, four for AS and four more for A2, including (at AS) Shakespeare and at least one other pre-1900 text. They will have had to cover prose, poetry and drama at both AS and at A2. In the second half of the course they will also have had to study at least one pre-1770 text and another pre-1900. The textual requirement for *English Language and Literature* students is precisely half this, with no commitment to studying Shakespeare or a pre-1770 text. On the other hand these students will have also have been required to study non-literary textual material (though not necessarily

extended, full-length texts) and to be able to analyse spoken as well as written texts. All discussion of texts will have had a language-centred focus, with correspondingly less emphasis on cultural and historical context.

The main thrust of the *English Language Subject Criteria* is on learning to apply different analytical frameworks (e.g. lexical, semantic, phonetic, pragmatic) for the systematic study of language at different levels. To some, the strength of the English Language specifications is that they require the learning of different methodologies rather than the acquisition of a particular body of knowledge; to others this is their drawback.

Within the 14-19 English teaching community, indeed, there is no consensus as to whether the present state of English studies is an improvement on what went before. On one side of the fence stand those who want to see the subject aligned more explicitly with the notion of communication in the widest sense and who believe that existing specifications (especially in *English Literature*) adhere too closely to outdated notions of canon and literary value, and have failed to move sufficiently to reflect the increasing fluidity and mobility of English studies, or to acknowledge and assimilate the theoretical developments and arguments of the past thirty years. On the other side stand those wishing to defend the traditions of English as taught and studied before Curriculum 2000, who believe that the imposition of Assessment Objectives with their complex weightings and definitions have undermined the creative and innovative elements of English study post-GCSE. In the middle are those who have welcomed the forward momentum in thinking about how English should be conceived and taught, who recognize the need for an informed debate about the relationship between English as taught in schools and as studied at university, but who regret the degree of prescription and regulation imposed by the Subject Criteria, which they believe have made an holistic approach to English studies more, not less, difficult to achieve.

This fragmentation of English into three quite self-contained subjects is the greatest difference now between English as studied at school and at university. Ironically, however, the most significant post-Curriculum 2000 development in English has done much to reunify English studies. The introduction of Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) in 2002 has re-established the principle of English as a coherent and integrated discipline post-16.

The AEA in *English* is a single 3-hour paper aimed at students who are likely to achieve a good A grade in

whichever of the three English A levels they have studied. It is an unprepared paper, based on the subject criteria for *English Literature*, *English Language* and *English Language and Literature*. There are no set texts, for the AEA is designed for students whichever awarding body's specification they have studied. No specific preparation for the examination is required, apart from familiarization with the format of the paper; and candidates for AEA English have, in each year so far, come equally from the maintained, tertiary and independent sectors.

At the start of the examination candidates are given a reading booklet with a range of material to be studied and assimilated in the first hour. This material consists of passages from primary texts (literary and non-literary, including transcripts of spoken English) and secondary material (mainly extracts from critical and theoretical writing relevant to the primary texts and to the candidates' wider study). In the first section of the paper, candidates choose two or more passages for comparative discussion; they are required initially to identify the framework for discussion that they will employ and then at the end to evaluate its effectiveness for the task. In the second section, they select one of five or six essay topics (one of which will include an exercise in adaptive or recreative writing) making use as appropriate of the critical and theoretical material in the reading booklet.

In the three years that the AEA has been running, English has consistently been the most popular AEA subject and the papers have been effective in identifying students' potential for future study and independent learning, rather than simply measuring their level of attainment against a set of prescribed assessment objectives. Significantly, AEA's have only one, generic, assessment objective – a feature welcomed by students, teachers and examiners alike. AEA English has provided the best indicator so far that A level English can be studied and assessed as an integrated and coherent discipline. UCAS has this year recognized AEA examinations as a valuable way of discriminating potentially excellent A level candidates, from whatever background they may come, and will be allocating points on the UCAS tariff (Distinction 40; Merit 20) from 2006.

The value of AEA's has been identified in the Tomlinson Final Report on *14-19 Curriculum and Qualifications Reform* (October 2004). The Working Group states that

For the highest attaining young people, the framework offers the prospect that whatever their diploma line they would be able to take their learning as far and as fast as they are capable of through the extended advanced level grade range, incorporating the levels of demand currently associated with the AEA in the A level system" (Ch. 10, para. 241, p.90).

Tomlinson also recommends that "GCE A level specifications should be revised to reduce the number of units in an A level from six to four, and reduce the weight and prescription of the assessment criteria" (Recommendation 29, p.89). He is concerned to move away from the present situation where assessments must address exhaustively all the course content and assessment objectives, towards a slimmed-down system where learning would be sampled (e.g. though eight texts might still be studied, they might not all need to be examined in the same way through eight discrete essays):

This recognizes that the assessment of the qualification can be more holistic and focused on the broader areas of learning while retaining and enhancing the depth and variety of assessment (Ch.9, para. 230, p. 87).

It is too early to know exactly how the Tomlinson recommendations on restructuring A levels – which should be implemented for first teaching from September 2007 – will impact on English studies post-16. However, with their recognition of the value of the AEA, their emphasis on reducing over-prescription and their call for a more holistic approach to assessment, they should be welcomed by schools and colleges on the one hand and by university English departments on the other. They should genuinely help to ease the transition from A level to university for those who choose to embark on the challenging and expanding discipline of English studies.

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Appendix 2: Assessment Objectives for AS and A2 English Literature

Assessment Objectives – English Literature		% Weighting		
		AS	A2	A level
AO1	communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insight appropriate to literary study, using appropriate terminology and accurate and coherent written expression	10 – 20	10 – 20	10 – 20
AO2i	respond with knowledge and understanding to literary texts of different types and periods	15 – 25	–	15 – 25
AO2ii	respond with knowledge and understanding to literary texts of different types and periods, exploring and commenting on relationships and comparisons between literary texts	–	15 – 25	
AO3	show detailed understanding of the ways in which writers' choices of form, structure and language shape meanings	10 – 20	10 – 20	10 – 20
AO4	articulate independent opinions and judgements, informed by different interpretations of literary texts by other readers	20 – 30	20 – 30	20 – 30
AO5i	show understanding of the contexts in which literary texts are written and understood	15 – 25	–	15 – 25
AO5ii	evaluate the significance of cultural, historical and other contextual influences on literary texts and study	15 – 25	–	15 – 25

Appendix 3: Assessment Objectives for AS and A2 English Language and Literature

Assessment Objectives – English Language and Literature		% Weighting		
		AS	A2	A level
AO1	communicate clearly the knowledge, understanding and insights gained from the combined study of literary and linguistic study, using appropriate terminology and accurate written expression	10 – 20	10 – 20	10 – 20
AO2i	in responding to literary and non-literary texts, distinguish, describe and interpret variation in meaning and form	15 – 25	–	20 – 30
AO2ii	respond with knowledge and understanding to texts of different types and from different periods, exploring and commenting on relationships and comparisons between them	–	20 – 30	
AO3i	respond to and analyse texts, using literary and linguistic concepts and approaches	15 – 25		
AO3ii	use and evaluate different literary and linguistic approaches to the study of written and spoken language, showing how these approaches inform their readings		20 – 30	20 – 30
AO4	show understanding of the ways contextual variation and choices of form, style and vocabulary shape the meanings of texts	15 – 25	15 – 25	15 – 25
AO5	identify and consider the ways attitudes and values are created and conveyed in speech and writing	15 – 25	15 – 25	15 – 25
AO6	demonstrate expertise and accuracy in writing for a variety of specific purposes and audiences, drawing on knowledge of literary texts and features of language to explain and comment on the choices made	10 – 20	10 – 20	10 – 20

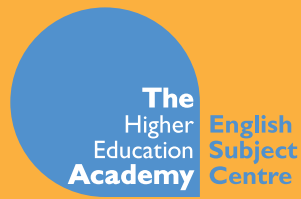
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**The English Subject Centre,
Royal Holloway, University of London,
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T• 01784 443221 F• 01784 470684

esc@rhul.ac.uk www.english.heacademy.ac.uk

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