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# A-LEVEL POLISH

Unit 2 Reading and Writing  
Report on the Examination

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2685  
June 2018

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Version: 1.0

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## General comments

The total number of students entered for PLSH2 this year was 1115, which represents a very small decrease from 2017. The Grade A\* boundary on this year's paper was set at 83, with 19.3% achieving this. Grade A was set at 74, and was achieved by 33.1% of students.

As last year, the ability of students was wide ranging. There were a number of well-prepared students with an excellent command of Polish, who knew what was expected of them and produced good quality papers. These students had studied their chosen texts and topics for Section 3 thoroughly. Others had a less secure command of the language but clearly knew the requirements of the exam and had been well-prepared for the literary and non-literary topics. However, there were also scripts from students who appeared not to have been prepared for the essays in Section 3 and who were relying on their knowledge of the language. Some did not even attempt to answer the essay questions. Teachers are reminded that 60% of the marks for this paper come from Section 3, and it is crucial that students be prepared to answer the questions on the literary and non-literary topics.

## Section 1 Comprehension

The comprehension questions this year were set on a text about communication. Most questions were answered correctly by the majority of the students. Incorrect answers were few in number and were mainly down to carelessness or to responses not supplying enough information.

Similarly, the True and False questions did not present any problems, with only a very small proportion of students giving incorrect answers.

## Section 2 Translation

Students were required to translate an excerpt from a literary text from English to Polish. The results were good, with the majority of students scoring 15 or more marks out of the 20 available. Students are reminded that their translation should be as close to the original text as possible. They are advised to read their finished translation through once they have finished it to make sure it makes sense and that there are no gaps. Where students are unsure of a word, a good guess is often better than leaving blank spaces or omitting the sentence altogether.

Some of the words and phrases that caused problems in this year's translation were 'firm', 'cigarette', 'typewriter', 'short temper', 'in his sixties', 'fox hunting', and 'three piece suit'. The word 'letters' caused some problems because it has two meanings in English which are rendered by different words in Polish. The first, *listy*, was required in the text. This was usually rendered correctly the first time it occurred, but many students then used *litery* when it occurred a second time towards the end of the text. 'Director of the firm' caused some confusion; some students used *reżyser*, film director, rather than *dyrektor*, which was the word required here. Another common source of confusion was the word 'principal'; some students mistook this for a noun and translated this sentence as *jednym z moich obowiązków dyrektora było przepisywanie listów*.

## Section 3 Literary and non-literary essays

Students are required to write two essays of at least 200 words, with no upper word limit. As in 2017, it appeared that many students had not been prepared for this part of the exam. Some left blank pages in section 3 whilst others apologised for not reading required texts. Students should be given opportunities to practise essay writing and be taught to use appropriate vocabulary; the

use of slang terms is not appropriate in a formal essay. Less able students tended to rely on description at the expense of evaluation, proper illustration, analysis and a conclusion that derived from the content of the essay.

A few students answered questions on the wrong topic. Questions on the literary topic, *Moral and social issues as presented in Polish drama*, must be answered with reference to drama, not film. Some students attempted to answer questions from both this topic and the non-literary topic, *The films of Andrzej Wajda – ‘Ashes and Diamonds’ and ‘Man of Marble’*, by referring to Wajda’s films.

## Literary Topics

### The fight for independence as a theme in Polish literature

*Kamienie na szaniec* was the most popular choice of text, but there were some essays on *Wierna rzeka* and on poetry. *Kamienie na szaniec* is a popular choice because it is quite short and easy to read, and because the plot, describing the fate of the boys during World War II who have just finished their schooling, is accessible to students. Weaker essays lacked any real knowledge of the text, and some students appeared to be relying on knowledge of the film adaptation, citing characters who are not in the book.

Essays on *Wierna rzeka* sometimes focused on the human drama rather than being centred on the topic of the fight for independence. Students mostly wrote about the doomed relationship between Salomea Brynicka and Józef Odrowąż. Hubert Olbromski, Salomea’s father, was rarely mentioned. Żeromski presents the sacrifice and heroism of all these people in his novel as an example of patriotism and heroism in the fight for independence of Poland.

### Moral and social issues as presented in Polish drama

*Moralność Pani Dulskiej* was the most popular choice, but there were also essays on *Tango* and *Balladyna*. Answers on *Tango* were usually good. Questions 4(a) and 4(b) were equally popular among those who had studied *Moralność Pani Dulskiej*, while 4(a) was more often chosen for other plays.

Many essays were descriptive, and when students used references it was often only to mention one or two facts. There was much criticism of Mrs Dulska, who was seen as domineering and controlling and only concerned about her family’s reputation, with little further analysis of the effect of her behaviour and attitude to life on her family. Both questions required analysis and evaluation of the protagonists’ actions to show who was the most responsible for the tragic events in the plays, or to show how their actions reflected the society of those times.

Some students were unable to use words such as *dulszczyzna*, *kołtun* and *fillister* correctly.

## Non-Literary Topics

### Poland and the Poles during World War II

Question 5(b) was the more popular choice here, but results were mixed. Some students relied on broad generalisations where precise factual detail is required. Where students were able to refer to names, places and dates in some detail to support their views they were able to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

### **The films of Andrzej Wajda – ‘Ashes and Diamonds’ and ‘Man of Marble’**

Question 6(a) was very popular with students as it allowed them to tap into the very essence of what cinema is supposed to do, which is to draw us as spectators into the lives of others so that we can experience the world through their eyes. In writing about Maciek or Mateusz, students were often good at empathising with the characters and understood their loss in human terms: the fall from grace, the missed opportunity for love and fulfillment, and the finality of death. All too often, however, they did not understand the historical context of these films or the politics of the times, and this lack of knowledge sometimes limited their appreciation of the films and prevented them from reaching the highest levels of the mark scheme.

There were, however, some poor essays where students lacked any real understanding of the background to the films. Some based their essays on Maciek’s romance with Krystyna without understanding that his tragic situation was caused by the political and historical events that took place in Poland in May 1945. The same lack of understanding of the situation in Poland in the period was sometimes shown in essays on Wajda’s second film, *Man of Marble*, where knowledge of Stalinism is of paramount importance to understand the protagonists’ dilemmas. In studying these films, students have an opportunity to learn a great deal about Polish history, life, and the turbulence the country went through in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was pleasing to see that some students had made the most of these opportunities. These students were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the context in which Wajda made these films, and so to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.

### **Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.  
[UMS conversion calculator](#)