



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION, 2026

English - Higher Level - Paper 1

Total Marks: 200

Wednesday, 3 June – Morning, 9.30 – 12.20

- This paper is divided into two sections, Section I COMPREHENDING and Section II COMPOSING.
- The paper contains **three** texts on the general theme of **INFLUENCE**.
- Candidates should familiarise themselves with each of the texts before beginning their answers.
- Both sections of this paper (COMPREHENDING and COMPOSING) must be attempted.
- Each section carries 100 marks.

SECTION I – COMPREHENDING

- Two Questions, A and B, follow each text.
- Candidates must answer a Question A on one text and a Question B on a different text. Candidates must answer only one Question A and only one Question B.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer a Question A and a Question B on the same text.

SECTION II – COMPOSING

- Candidates must write on **one** of the compositions 1 – 7.

Do not hand this up.

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TEXT 1 – An Influential Place - My Unquenchable City

This text is an edited article published in the *Financial Times* magazine in May 2024. Writer, Jeannette Winterson, celebrates Manchester and the spirit, cheer and energy that power her place of birth and influenced our world.

There are all kinds of explanations for the Manchester magic. Manchester is in the south of the north of England. Its spirit has a contrariness to it – north and south bound up together. Untamed and unconventional; at the same time connected, worldly and self-aware.

This place is ancient and modern. The Romans came here. It is the foremost city of the Industrial Revolution. The birthplace of computing science. Where Mr Rolls met Mr Royce. Where Rutherford split the atom. When Manchester's days as the engine of England were exhausted, its music scene began. How many bands can you name? The Hollies, The Smiths, Oasis, Simply Red, New Order, Elbow. I have to stop and I'm not even mentioning football. Or Old Trafford.

Coal, canals, cheap accommodation (then, not now); even the weather. None goes deep enough. Go deeper. It's under your feet – in the layers of soil and time. If this sounds fanciful, visit Jodrell Bank observatory, twenty miles south of the city. One of its telescopes is near the site of a Bronze Age barrow. What can't be hidden by the impressive distractions of the visitor experience is the energy itself. Powerful, eerie and strange.

I believe there is a connection between people and place. Between you and the land, its history, its resonance. This is unique and can't be replicated or Disneyfied. Like a good local cheese, there is a flavour not found elsewhere. Manchester is local and global. In AD 79, when the Romans established a fortification here, Manchester was already looking outwards.

The Manchester energy is particular. There's a vitality that bubbles up, whether you are



rich or poor or somewhere in the middle. It's the sense of humour, of course – the world's first soap opera, *Coronation Street*, airing in 1960 and still going strong, is built on that humour. When it rains every day, you need a dry wit. The cheerfulness of northern people is not a postcard cliché. It's real, and it's born out of the resilience that fought for workers' rights and votes for women. Tough, plain-speaking people who readily talk to strangers. That can be a shock – to Londoners in particular. "M People" like to show off their repartee. At the railway station recently, I was hesitating over a bunch of melancholy supermarket flowers, when the woman next to me said, "Well, love, it's up to you – but I wouldn't waste the water in the vase on those."

Manchester people love dazzle; Chanel's Métier d'art show in Manchester last year was an inspired fit. The brand paid tribute to the city's textile history, and to the skill of those who wove and sewed cloth to the highest standards. Building a roofed arcade over an alley, and marching models dressed in wools and tweeds up and down a rainy street, sang to the spirit of the place at its most practical and its most extravagant. As Mark Radcliffe puts it so well: "Manchester is a city that thinks a table is for dancing on."

In the early 1700s, Manchester was home to fewer than 10,000 souls. By 1830 it was a teeming sprawl of slum dwellings serving 99 cotton mills. The world's first passenger railway (Manchester is all firsts) started running between it and Liverpool in 1830, and in 1838 trains linked London, via Birmingham to this site of rough alchemy. Passengers reported being assailed from Stockport onwards by the stench of its mephitic vapours. Charles Dickens, who visited the city often because his sister, Fanny, lived there, describes himself as "astonished" and "disgusted" in equal measure. It was Dickens who ceremonially opened Britain's first public library in Manchester in 1852 - believing passionately in the value of reading for working-class men and women. The library was mobbed by people trying to borrow books, so much so that a police officer had to be stationed on the checkout desk.

When the Manchester writer, Mrs Gaskell, wrote about the cotton mills, she said, "I have seen Hell and it is white." No surprise, then, that the Trades Union movement began in Manchester in 1868 – or that the Pankhursts, all born in the city, founded the Women's Social and Political Union there in 1903. (One of the unexpected side-effects of the hated factory system was that it brought women



together. Suddenly they were not isolated at home or in domestic service. The Pankhursts were middle class, but their support came from factory women radicalised by their own circumstances.)

There's a statue of Abraham Lincoln just off Albert Square, in recognition of the support that the majority of factory workers lent the abolitionist north in the American Civil War; knowing what hardship meant, they refused to process slave-grown cotton. The People's History Museum in Manchester chronicles the connections between past, present and future. This is a city that lives across time. No visit to the city is complete without going to the Science and Industry Museum to stare at the scale of the world's first (yes, another) Stored Programme Computer, completed in 1948. As we enter the AI revolution, we can learn so much from the Industrial Revolution, from the story of the industrial north. This time, could 'progress' be for the many and not the few?

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 1, what are the most significant aspects of the city that give Manchester its "magic"? Develop three points in your response, supporting them with reference to TEXT 1. (15)
- (ii) In TEXT 1 the author tells us that she believes, 'there is a connection between people and place.' In your opinion, how valid is this assertion? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Aspects of the style of this passage are effective in making it a thought-provoking and colourful piece of writing. Discuss this statement, supporting your response with reference to four features of the writer's style from TEXT 1. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Write an **article** about what your ideal city or town of the future will be like, for 'Look-A-Head', a magazine that engages with future developments in our world. In your **article** you should: describe the physical landscape of your ideal city or town, explore some of the positive societal changes and impacts the place will have on its population, and discuss the various challenges you would have to overcome in order to realise your vision. Your article may be serious or humorous or a combination of both.

TEXT 2 – Influential Life Moment

TEXT 2 consists of an edited extract from Elif Shafak's 2024 novel, *There are Rivers in the Sky*, set in Victorian London and featuring Arthur, an extraordinary boy of the slums with a brilliant memory. When he is apprenticed at a printing press, the world opens up far beyond the slums for him.

If, as the poets say, the journey of life resembles the march of rivers to the sea, at times meandering aimlessly, at others purposeful and unswerving, the bend in the flow is where the story takes a sudden turn, winding away from its predicted course into a fresh and unexpected direction. Becoming an apprentice at one of England's leading printing and publishing houses is the twist that changes Arthur's destiny forever.

In the beginning they give him random tasks of trivial importance – mopping floors, dusting shelves, removing cobwebs, blocking mouse-holes. His employers watch his every move, noting how he rises to each demand and challenge. Little by little they allow him approach the machines. Printing is a dangerous profession, Arthur discovers. The ten-cylinder rotary steam printing press is not easy to operate. Dangerous, yes, but fascinating! The boy is spellbound as he observes how a single machine can not only transfer letters and images on blank paper but also make thousands of identical copies. The company produces a variety of books and periodicals – including *Punch* magazine, which sells more than forty thousand copies each week by poking fun at the pompous and the powerful.

This place is nothing like school. There are no canings, no beatings, no dunce's caps and no punishment baskets where students are forced to sit suspended from the ceiling. The job is onerous and the routine exacting, but Arthur does not mind. Determined not to disappoint his bosses, he works tirelessly. His fingers may be permanently ink-stained, his ears full of the thrumming of engines, but he is charged with a strange sense of purpose. For the first time in his life, he feels part of something important.



His first assignment is to help make postage stamps. The boy finds the letterpress with its hard cut-out image charming, but what mesmerises him is how a tiny piece of paper can hold such artistry, value and meaning. Arthur also delights in lithography. The limestone slabs are heavy, the acid water burns his skin, but the outcome is astounding – he is exhilarated by seeing a drawn image come alive, both a reflection of the original and still unique, like a vivid sequel to a fading dream. Thanks to new methods of mass production, people across the country can now decorate their homes with black-and-white prints made from engravings of famous works of art, while books and newspapers can be printed faster and on a vastly larger scale.

“Words are like birds,” says Mr Bradbury. “When you publish books, you are setting caged birds free. They can go wherever they please. They can fly over the highest walls and across vast distances, settling in the mansions of the gentry, in farmsteads and labourers’ cottages alike. You never know whom those words will reach, whose hearts will succumb to their sweet songs.”

Arthur is also taught to engrave steel. He pores over the illuminated paintings of

William Blake, riveted by their imaginative power and mystical intensity. More and more he comes to realise that people fall into three camps: those who hardly, if ever, see beauty, even when it strikes them between the eyes; those who recognise it only when it is made apparent to them; and those rare souls who find beauty everywhere they turn, even in the most unexpected places.

The day he receives his first wages, Arthur of the sewers and slums, leaves the office with a quiet sense of achievement. As it is a Saturday, most of the shops have stayed open late. He walks fast, checking over his shoulder every few steps to see if there is anyone following him. The city, canopied under a fog like smoke from a thousand fires, hides pickpockets and cutpurses. But that is nothing new. The only thing that has changed is that he has something to lose now. How strange that having money makes one feel less safe.

He notices a hansom cab with a liveried driver, pulled up in front of a cordwainer's shop. As he edges past it, he glances inside the open carriage door, a young woman not that much older than he is, sits with her skirts spread neatly around her, a silk fan resting on the velvet seat, waiting for the sales girls to



bring her samples of finely crafted shoes. Their gazes meet briefly. In that moment Arthur sees himself through her eyes, taking in his shabby bowler hat and worn jacket, ill-fitting and mud-spattered. He feels acutely the difference between them, as the wealthy lady looks through and beyond him, as though he were invisible.

If poverty were a place, a hostile landscape into which you were deliberately pushed or accidentally stumbled, it would be an accursed forest – the branches clutch at you, the brambles draw you in. Even when you manage to cut down one obstacle, instantly it is replaced by another. Poverty saps your will, little by little. But just now, with coins jingling in his pocket, Arthur feels hopeful. One day he will get out of this city and travel far, to the ends of the earth if need be, where the margins of water and land seamlessly merge, and people will never know from what abject penury he came.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of TEXT 2, how did the experience of starting work as an apprentice, impact Arthur? Develop three points in your response, supporting them with reference to TEXT 2. (15)
- (ii) In TEXT 2, the author tells us that having money makes Arthur feel vulnerable. In your opinion, how valid is the assertion that, 'having money makes one feel less safe'? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Aspects of the style of this passage are effective in making it a thought-provoking and evocative piece of writing. Discuss this statement, supporting your response with reference to four features of the writer's style from TEXT 2. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

A discussion is taking place on the **letters page** of a national newspaper about whether postage stamps should continue to be produced, given that fewer people are sending letters via the post. Write a **letter to the Editor** of the newspaper expressing your views on the issue. In your **letter** you should: explain your stance on the matter, challenge some of the arguments you expect that the opposing view will make, and consider how you think correspondence will take place in the future world.

TEXT 3 – Influence of the Arts

TEXT 3 consists of two edited extracts: the first is taken from Colm Tóibín's essay on the poet, Thomson Gunn, in his collection of essays, *Ship in Full Sail* and the second consists of extracts from Enuma Okoro's article entitled, *Art can Change how we Understand the World*.

(a) *"Ship in Full Sail"* – Colm Tóibín

Some time early in 1973, at the age of eighteen, I had found a copy of a book of poems entitled, *Quest for Reality, an Anthology of Short poems in English*, edited by Yvor Winters, in the library in UCD. I am the only person I know who actually treasures this book and keeps it close at all times. Or at least I thought I was until I found a review on www.amazon.com from 2000 by Ben Kilpela: "Yvor Winters decided to illustrate by example what he thought are the greatest poems ever written in English. All but a handful (in my view) are so great that it takes one's breath away to read them. Reading them almost makes for mystical experiences. This is, simply put, the greatest book of poetry ever published. If you love poetry, you must find or own a copy."

Aged eighteen and nineteen, I had taken from Winters what I needed and what I did not find anywhere else: the idea that phrases and sentences should say something that is true as much as this is possible.

I wonder if all of us are susceptible once or twice – maybe in our late teens or early twenties – to a new idea, a fresh way of thinking about something, an approach.

Yvor Winters was dogmatic, and I must have found that useful. He believed that a poem should not reflect an experience or describe an experience, but rather that it should be in itself an experience, a kind of energy, as vital as feeling. More than a decade after Winters' death, Thomson Gunn, an English poet and student of his wrote an essay about Winters. He described Winters in the classroom at Stanford: "His love, his passion for poetry showed clearly enough in his classes. More than one student commented on the fact that



in speaking of some poem or passage he particularly admired he was apt to use the uncharacteristic word 'haunting'."

(b) *Art can Change how we Understand the World* – Enuma Okoro

Over the course of this year, whether I'm in my home city or travelling, I've made time to visit art galleries and museums. One of the most pleasurable and satisfying parts of this pastime is the moment I chance upon a work that arrests me, and that is also new to me. I've come across new works in the past several months that have made me laugh out loud, moved me, enraged me, or made me reflect more on a particular segment of society or a certain phase of life. I've found myself thinking about how an exhibit can speak to us on any number of levels. I believe art can deeply affect how we consider the way we live and the way we see and understand one another's experiences and histories. Throughout history people have recognised the power of art, and figures in authority have felt threatened by certain works that pose a challenge to their ideologies. A world in which art is confiscated does not seem to be a world that has any room for an expansive and open imagination.

Titus Kaphar is a contemporary American artist and filmmaker. Much of his work explores the narrative gaps in history, highlighting ways representations of the past remain relevant to how we comprehend present-day realities.

In a TED talk titled “Can Art Amend History?” Kaphar talks about the importance of what we see in art. He shares a poignant story of taking his two young sons to the American Museum of Natural History in New York. At the entrance to the museum is a sculpture of Theodore Roosevelt sitting on a horse, with a Native American man and an African man walking beside him. One of his sons asked why Roosevelt gets to ride the horse and the other two men have to walk. Kaphar then explains to the audience how he understood that to be a question loaded with deeper questions of justice.

The contemporary German photographer Thomas Struth has been using his camera as both an artistic and investigative tool for close to five decades. “Louvre 2, Paris, 1989” is a Struth photograph of a group of school children sitting together on the floor at the Louvre looking at works of art with their teacher. The grand room with vaulted ceilings and large historical paintings contrasts strikingly with the cluster of small bodies packed tightly together on the expanse of gleaming wood flooring. This composition creates an evocative sense of the intersection between history and contemporary times. I love to think about the fact that the children in this photograph, taken in 1989, would now



be 36 years older. Did this moment or museum visit affect any of them in any lasting way? A question he asked himself at the time of his museum visits was: “What can you valuably take from pictures from the past, which might be a catalyst for interesting or productive ideas for the future?” I think this remains an invaluable question for all of us and access to art that covers a range of themes from across cultures and time periods is essential for generating productive ideas for the future. Our shared humanity includes a collective shared history that can help inform how we create our future.

N.B. Candidates may NOT answer Question A and Question B on the same text.

QUESTION A – 50 Marks

- (i) Based on your reading of both extracts in TEXT 3, how do you think Art can have an influence on those who engage with it? Develop three points in your response, supporting them with reference to TEXT 3. (15)
- (ii) In TEXT 3 Enuma Okora asserts that humans have, ‘a collective shared history that can help inform how we create our future’. In your opinion, how valid is this assertion? Develop at least two points in your response. (15)
- (iii) Aspects of the style of TEXT 3 are effective in making it thought-provoking and engaging. Discuss this statement, supporting your response with reference to four features of style from TEXT 3. You may refer to either or both writers in your response. (20)

QUESTION B – 50 Marks

Culture Night aims to encourage participation in the Arts. Your local council is seeking **proposals** from people who are interested in putting on an event for **Culture Night 2027**, that will have an impact on the local community. You are interested in putting on such an event on the night. Write the **text of your proposal** in which you: describe what the event will be, outline the practical logistics that will be required to put on the event successfully, and explain how you believe it will have an impact on the local community.

SECTION II

COMPOSING

(100 marks)

Write a composition on **any one** of the assignments that appear in **bold print** below.

Each composition carries 100 marks.

The composition assignments are intended to reflect language study in the areas of information, argument, persuasion, narration, and the aesthetic use of language.

1. The three texts on this paper reflect the influence experiences have on individuals.

Write a short story featuring a character who is at odds with a community that has fallen under the influence of a negative force.

2. In TEXT 3 the writers discuss the influence of the creative arts.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on how being creative has a role to play in many aspects of your life.

3. In TEXT 1 the writer explores how the city of Manchester has inspired many popular musicians.

Write an opinion piece for a popular magazine about the power and influence of music, musicians and the music industry.

4. In TEXT 1 the writer identifies a connection between the 'past, present and future.'

Write a discursive essay in which you consider the extent to which we should value and respect the legacies we have inherited from the past.

5. The theme of this examination paper is 'Influence'.

Write a speech for or against the motion that: "Social-media influencers are best ignored."

6. In TEXT 2 Arthur has a brief encounter with a young woman in a hansom cab on the London streets.

Write a short story where the young woman in TEXT 2 features as a character who has a significant influence on others.

7. In TEXT 2 Arthur's experience of joining the workplace is enriching.

Write a personal essay in which you reflect on a moment that was enriching for you, in a variety of ways.

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Acknowledgements

Images and texts that appear on this examination paper were sourced as follows:

Texts

Winterson, Jeanette. *Financial Times*. 2024

Shafak, Elif. *There are Rivers in the Sky*. Penguin Books. 2025

Tóibín, Colm. 'Ship in Full Sail'. The Gallery Press. 2022

Okoro, Enuma. 'Art can change how we understand the world.' *Financial Times*. 2025

Images

Image on page 2: <https://cms.w2m.com/dam/Sites/lcarion/Blog/manchester-mucho-mas-que-futbol-que-tambien/canal-manchester.jpg>

Image on page 3: https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=496239955840608&set=a.496239919173945&type=3&from_lookaside=1

Images on page 4: <https://victorianweb.org/art/stainedglass/adam/13.jpg>; https://brewminate.com/victorian-print-culture/#google_vignette

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Leaving Certificate – Higher Level

English

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