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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE Ordinary Level

Papers 1115/01, 1120/01, 1123/01 and 1124/01

Composition

General comments

Most candidates for this component of the syllabus, in the many areas of the world where this examination is taken, demonstrated a pleasing ability to respond to this paper in a thoughtful, imaginative and confident way. They had obviously been well prepared in the basic skills of essay writing and had become familiar with the unchanged format and requirements of this paper. They approached the examination with some enthusiasm, capturing the interest of the Examiners and showing genuine engagement with the task. Examiners commented again on the improved level of general communication achieved, particularly by the weaker candidates. Whilst there were relatively few scripts at the highest level, there were few very poor scripts seen and some improvement in the accuracy of basic spelling, punctuation and control of sentence structures meant that meaning was rarely in doubt even in the weakest scripts, testifying to the hard work done by teachers and candidates in preparation for the examination.

The range of topics offered on this paper afforded plenty of opportunity for candidates to draw on their own experience and whilst the narrative of **Question 5** proved to be easily the most popular choice, there was no topic that was obviously regarded as too difficult or inaccessible and attracted noticeably few responses. All questions achieved differentiation and the candidates seemed to find themselves at ease with the topics and able to write at the required length, however limited their skills. It was particularly pleasing to note that there were fewer obviously prepared essays this year, although identical, prepared and 'learned' paragraphs were sometimes evident in the work of several candidates from the same Centre. Many candidates developed their essays at some length, sustaining a fair level of accurate writing and relevant content, although some candidates wrote at too great a length, allowing their essays to become rambling and tedious and often losing the linguistic accuracy of the more careful early work. Lengthy compositions in **Part 1**, sometimes resulted in short, hurried or unfinished responses in **Part 2**, forfeiting marks that would have been gained with better planning and use of the time available, at least to ensure that the five content elements were clearly included in the letter and thus five marks were gained. Whilst few rubric offences were reported, a small number of candidates wrote short or unfinished responses to **Part 2** and several chose to tackle the **Part 2** exercise first and found themselves unable to write more than 200 words for **Part 1**. Candidates must realise that these very short answers incur a penalty which can so easily be avoided by sensible division of the time available between the two sections of the paper, as they are clearly reminded on the question paper itself. Practice in writing timed essays in preparation for the examination should give candidates the confidence to tackle the two sections of the paper in the order and within the time limits recommended and thus avoid serious lack of balance in essay length.

The importance of planning and developing ideas logically cannot be overstated, especially in a discursive response such as that required in **Question 3**. Although it was quite a popular question, many of the candidates who chose it were unable to avoid repetition or incoherence and produce a structured, progressive argument with varied sentence and paragraph openings to retain the interest of the reader.

As always, candidates struggled with verb forms and tense sequences; the use of the full-stop, not the comma, to separate sentences; errors of idiom; the omission of vital words (particularly the negative 'not' and the definite and indefinite articles) and the punctuation and paragraphing of direct speech. These remain the aspects of English that appear to present most difficulty to candidates in this examination. Linguistic inaccuracy, poor planning and failure to check their finished work often prevented candidates from achieving the high marks that their ideas and ambition warranted.

Some worrying trends seen more frequently this year were the failure to use capital letters with the pronoun 'I'; lack of variety in sentence structures, with the tendency to use simple sentences throughout or to write involved, overlong sentences with excessive use of coordinates; the failure to indicate or paragraph direct speech; confusion between direct and indirect speech, prefacing the speech words with 'that' ('...he said that there is a person who has a shop and its first floor is of visitor rooms. The you may get a room if the owner of the shop agrees.') and failure to paragraph entire compositions or letters. There were two features that produced unidiomatic phrases:

- strange word order in the sentence:
 'The driver bus needed help to get out him from the bus.'
 'These all things are shown in advertisements.'
 'If you live your big part of life in a same house...'
 'Still I had to go more 12 to 15 kilometres.'
- the insertion of 'so that' before the infinitive:
 'Advertisements are made so that to attract young people.'
 'Find that paper as quickly as possible so that to make a new building for the boys' school.'
- Finally, the continued use of e-mail/text message symbols was noted, (even in letters to the Principal!), despite warnings in previous reports that these abbreviations are unacceptable.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Describe the busy day of someone who works in your area

This was not a very popular question but many of those who chose it produced interesting and engaging answers, focusing on the character as well as the activities of the person concerned. Candidates had the opportunity to write from their own experience and the accounts were always relevant and often lively and well-observed. The 'busy' people included teachers, doctors, nurses, farmers, taxi-drivers, social workers, shop assistants and factory or field workers. Parents or family members were often mentioned, with emphasis on the idea that being busy was not confined to the workplace but entailed household chores and duties involved in raising a family as well. Many people were busy running several jobs at once: the day, the evening, the night shift and the week-end job, all necessary to make ends meet. Elements of respect, admiration and affection were clearly implied in the descriptions, which offered real insight into the daily lives in the areas concerned.

Some candidates provided an endless, chronological list of the many jobs and obligations undertaken throughout the day, with little striking detail and the obvious over-use of the word 'then' adding to the monotony. Some answers gave the impression of being as rushed as the day described, lacking the required punctuation and paragraphing. Linguistically, tense consistency proved a problem, with frequent switching from present ('works') to past ('worked') and repeated use of the appropriate subject pronoun 'He' or 'She' as sentence openings.

This topic seemed to have particular appeal to some of the mature candidates taking the examination in the Open Centres, who were able to write from their own daily experience in the workplace.

Question 2

Neighbours

This was quite a popular question, with the responses falling into three distinct approaches: a definition followed by a discussion of the concept of neighbourliness; a description of good and bad neighbours known to the candidate with examples of personal experiences of both; an account of one or two particular incidents involving a particular set of neighbours.

The first of these interpretations was frequently linked to religious beliefs, traditions and practices, with reference to the teaching of the Koran or the Bible on the subject of charity to neighbours. The religious background provided a useful framework for the response, further illustrated by examples from experience and produced some informative and interesting reading for Examiners. However, in the hands of weaker candidates who lacked the more sophisticated organisational and thinking skills to deal with this approach, the answers became repetitive in vocabulary and ideas, lacking progression of argument or interest.

Those candidates who pursued the other approaches generally fared better, highlighting incidents and stories where 'good' neighbours had saved the day, helping with wedding arrangements or ferrying somebody to hospital, and contrasting them with the petty and negative attitudes of 'bad' neighbours, who were unsociable or even deliberately anti-social, with disturbing noise made late at night or rubbish deposited in the street. These accounts, written presumably from personal experience of real people, always had strong human interest and often humour.

Linguistic uncertainties in this topic arose from confusion of 'neighbour' and 'neighbourhood', unidiomatic use of 'shift' for 'move' and 'stay' for 'live', an irritating tendency to mis-spell neighbour as 'neihbour' and the use of the continuous present instead of the simple present:

'All our neighbours are having all the qualities of a good neihbour.'

Question 3

'Advertising has become too great an influence on young people.' Do you agree?

This proved to be a popular question but the level of success varied considerably from one region to another and the topic produced some of the best and some of the most confused responses in the examination. There were some very good answers, particularly from candidates with a background of Business Studies or Media Studies, who were able to call on a wide and precise vocabulary, statistics and illustrations from a range of advertising media to produce carefully structured, cogently argued and clearly focused insights into the business of advertising and the influence that it exerts on young people. Many agreed with the view expressed in the question and blamed advertising for corruption, immorality and disease among the young, while others suggested that the influence was more benign and not excessive, particularly as a source of information about educational and employment opportunities and availability of aids to better health, specifically for young people. Candidates realised the deliberate targeting of young people by advertisers and explained the psychology behind such advertisements as those for cigarettes, alcohol, fashionable clothes, cars, beauty products and electrical goods, without necessarily assessing the degree of influence wielded by these approaches.

At the other end of the spectrum were the essays produced by candidates who lacked the linguistic skills and intellectual perception needed for a successful discursive or argumentative essay. Answers were often repetitive in expression and ideas, with much confusion about the use of 'advertising', 'advertisement' and 'ad.' (or often, bizarrely, 'add.'), leading to frequent errors in verb agreement and articles. Many forgot to relate the essay to young people and drifted into discussing the pros and cons of advertising in general, or to contrasting so-called 'good' and 'bad' advertisements. Few noted and responded to the precise implications of the given topic, particularly to the key words 'too great an influence'. Many of the weaker essays were far too long, making the repetition and the errors all the more obvious. Careful planning, clear statements and suitable linking words are the essentials of the discursive essay that were missing here. Other linguistic errors included, again, an intrusive use of 'that' e.g. 'As we know that nowadays young people want to be fashionable.' or 'We wonder that why this has been shown.' or 'They get influenced that to do these stuffs like in the advertising.'

As many Examiners reported, the word 'advertisement' was far too often misspelt as 'advertisment'.

Question 4

Write about an incident which made the customers laugh at the owner of a shop

This was much less popular than the other narrative choice on the paper, which was perhaps not surprising as it provided a very specific scenario and demanded considerable imagination to conjure up a convincing account. Nevertheless, Examiners enjoyed some amusing and graphic responses from those that were submitted, with some unexpected humorous situations enlivened by successfully handled direct speech and real characterisation, no doubt derived from candidates' own experience. Some candidates got rather over-involved in the build-up but there was obvious enjoyment in the descriptions of the shop-owner's discomfort and embarrassment at slipping on oily floors, staining his clothing, being caught on 'Candid Camera' for TV shows etc.

The main linguistic problems encountered in this topic were those of unpunctuated or unparagraphed direct speech, which sometimes impeded or obscured communication.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the words 'It was the same bus I got onto every day, but that day, as I sat down, I sensed something was different.'

This was the most popular choice by far in all the regions. It provided an opportunity to combine personal experience of a familiar daily journey with some imagination and narrative skills in creating suspense and interest for the reader. The best answers had a strong plot, pace and control in a first-person narrative that allowed the candidate to assume a heroic role in stories of hijack, kidnap, robbery, terrorism, ghosts or birthday surprises organised with the collusion of the bus driver. Less sensationally, others found they were on the wrong bus, were late for an exam, met the boy/girl of their dreams, heard sad or joyful news later that day, discovered that the driver was not the 'Uncle' with whom they were familiar or realised that the 'difference' was the installation of air-conditioning in the bus! There was considerable use made of the wake-up call that proved it was all a dream.

Too many candidates made the mistake of introducing irrelevant material about their morning routine with lengthy details of getting up, having breakfast and 'dressing up' before getting to the bus at all, thus losing some pace and focus at the start. However, there was some effective observational and narrative detail, including the use of dialogue, in these stories, which were obviously written with considerable enjoyment, even by the weaker candidates.

Examiners noted that candidates needed to revise their use of 'vehicle vocabulary/idiom': 'got on', 'got up', 'got down', 'got off', 'up the bus', 'on the bus', 'in the bus', 'alight', 'aboard' (not 'abroad') – all were found frequently mis-used in these narratives.

Part 2

The directed writing task in this part of the paper aims to assess different skills from those tested in the continuous free writing of **Part 1**. Here the rubric suggests an audience to address, a purpose to be served and some specific information to be conveyed. As well as carrying out the instructions clearly and accurately in the required format, candidates are expected to adopt a style and tone appropriate to the task.

The situation and instructions in this paper were easily understood and the candidates embarked eagerly on the task for which they had been well prepared.

Candidates are well aware that every clearly stated item of the required information will gain them a mark and many of them sensibly dedicated a paragraph to each item, to ensure that the necessary elaboration of each point was successfully accomplished. Most candidates gained all five marks. If the first point was not awarded it was either because the candidate had copied the wording of the question paper, without elaboration or because the piece of paper was not found in a book but 'on the cricket pitch', 'in the kitchen', 'floating out of the air' or in some other unlikely container. If the second point was missed it was usually because the candidate had not noted that both authorship *and* date of writing needed to be provided or that the reference to the date was too vague: 'a little while ago'; 'last month' (pointless if the letter to the Principal was itself without a date). The third point offered the opportunity to reveal a variety of secrets about the school from drug dealing, theft, fraud, vandalism, bribery, threats of injury, leaked exam papers, poor teaching, unhygienic facilities, imminent closure, financial difficulties and sexual liaisons between pupils and staff, to legacies, donations, hidden treasure, underground passages and even plans for the future of the school and the Principal from the Ministry of Education! These discoveries were met with appropriate shock, horror, dismay, amazement or delight and finally sensible advice was offered to the Principal, often in a rather officious or preremptory tone but with the clearly stated interests of the school at heart.

The greeting of the letter was given on the question paper, though sometimes transcribed as 'Dear Sir/Madam' or 'Respected Sir/Madam'. A number of letters carried no valediction or signature.

Some candidates became so enthusiastic in their detailed descriptions of the message that they wrote much and lost time that could have been more usefully spent checking for errors and omissions in the scripts. Those who wrote concisely, highlighting the precise details, produced the best work. Although a structure for the piece was clearly suggested by the bullet points, many candidates failed to paragraph the account. Other common errors were 'peice of paper'; 'your's sincerely' and 'suprised'.

Generally, this proved to be a successful question in that it was accessible to candidates across the ability range and from all the areas that sit this examination.

Final comment

This paper enabled candidates to meet the assessment objectives of the syllabus and achieved effective differentiation across a pleasing range of achievement. Examiners commented on how much they enjoyed and appreciated the interesting material and the good standard of so much of the work of the candidates in this examination.

Papers 1115/02, 1120/02, 1123/02 and 1124/02

Comprehension

General comments

The subject matter of the passage seemed to engage the interest of candidates from all Centres but responses showed the usual varying standards of achievement. Candidates whose overall mark was lower than average made various serious errors, including wrong verb forms and tense errors, distorted syntax, omission or obvious misuse of prepositions, serious errors of agreement (a singular subject and a plural verb or vice-versa), and ingrained weaknesses of punctuation, i.e. the habitual comma replacing the necessary full stop. Many Examiners noted a new error this year: the omission of the definite article, and it was suggested that this was an attempt to reduce the number of words in the final summary question.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Although this question was intended to be a straightforward introduction to the paper, a surprising number of candidates found it a problem. Answers were sometimes garbled or over length, or reliant on indiscriminate copying without understanding.
- (b) Of the two correct answers, 'prey' and 'trap', the former was the less commonly given. Incorrect answers included 'watching', 'lie', 'wait', 'perilous'; 'jagged' and 'wreck'. The last was very common. Another weakness was a preoccupation with 'rocky islands'. There was surprisingly low scoring for an introductory question.

Question 2

- (a) The two reasons given were generally the same: lighthouses gave brighter light, fires a dimmer one. This left no room for 'permanence', the height advantage of the lighthouse's lamp being generally preferred.
- (b) Fewer candidates gained this mark than might have been expected. Some mentioned the need for keepers without pointing out the need for them to live on the premises. Others picked on the expense of maintaining lighthouses. The weakest selected the disadvantage of this particular lighthouse as having 'a mystery that later surrounded it'.

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates found difficulty in finding adequate substitutes for 'isolated' and 'hostile' making no attempt to do so. 'Deserted' was quite frequently offered for 'isolated', and variations of 'extreme' or 'unpredictable' for 'hostile'.
- (b) Quite a number of candidates restricted themselves to lifting the building materials.

Question 4

Most candidates found these an easy two marks, offering 'colourful contents' and 'loud explosion'.

Question 5

There were a number of disappointing answers to this question, some very lengthy, describing what was found in the lighthouse. Some offered glosses that were too weak, e.g. 'worried'; or too generalised, e.g. 'hairs stood on end' or 'could not contain himself'. However, the question proved to be a good discriminator in that the better candidates were able to distil the answer, whereas the weaker ones – who understood the connection between 'running' and 'breathlessness' – were unable to provide the second half of the answer – the sailor's emotional state. The word 'breathless' was understood by many to indicate a gasp of surprise at disorders such as unmade beds or a stopped clock.

Question 6

- (a) There were some good answers here: 'searched high and low', or 'in every nook and cranny'. A few (relatively few) answers offered 'they surrounded the buildings' or 'they walked in a line' or something equally odd. Very few failed to gain the second point, 'they were looking for the log-book entry'.
- (b) There was a mixed response to this question. Better candidates wrote, simply and accurately, 'the three keepers'; others offered 'traces of the three keepers', which did not answer the question, since traces had already been found. A few candidates gave the less obvious but certainly correct answer: 'an explanation of their absence'.

Question 7

- (a) This was the least successfully answered question on the paper. Many candidates simply did not know where to stop in recounting the details of paragraph nine. Few could find a substitute for 'unconvincing'.
- (b) Although some candidates did appreciate the simple significance of 'less fanciful', too many felt the need to recount the full details of the third theory. Many lengthy discourses were offered on climate, depression and squabbles between the keepers.

Question 8

Responses to this question varied according to Centres, though many candidates found it the most difficult question on the examination paper.

Question 9

The average score for this question was three marks. The fact that eight words are offered and candidates need choose only five does highlight the problem of choice. 'Mounting', 'film', and 'devastation' were the words most successfully glossed; 'volunteered' and 'fateful' the least successful. Candidates should be advised to go back to the passage set and to re-read their chosen words in context. Other reasons for failure to score were giving more than one alternative to the word to be glossed, or using the designated word in a sentence of the candidate's own invention. It is understood that this is an excellent way to familiarise candidates with the contextual meanings of English vocabulary in the classroom, but it is not appropriate where this question is concerned.

Question 10

Most candidates found it a straightforward exercise to pick out the pieces of evidence and assess the reasonable contents score in 150 words. There were few short summaries, but more than usual that were over length. Some candidates seemed unaware that they were summarising at all, offering a plethora of detail and sometimes offering discussion of their own. Points 1, 2 and 4 were usually scored, but point 3 was seldom. Points 6 and 7 were also common, although sometimes 'gate' and 'door' were confused in a candidate's attempt at own words. Points 9-13 were gained by those who opted for the simplest selective approach, with minimal alteration of the original passage. Sadly, those struggling to render such simple details in their own words could become guilty of long-windedness or poor expression.

The last four points were most often gained by selective lifters. Some candidates lost marks at this point through garbled English or omission of vital details such as the location of the grass, railings or boulder. A particularly distinctive error in the use of English was the view that articles, both definite and indefinite, were an optional luxury. It was noticeable that some candidates, finding themselves above the word limit on the completion of their summary, went back and crossed out many or all of the articles included in their original version in order to comply with the 150 word limit.

Some candidates are still offering two answers to this question, misunderstanding the introductory rubric. Conversely some candidates still opt for wholesale copying of the passage, although many have become quite adept at selecting only the relevant details. They tend to rely on short, simple sentences with little attempt at their own complex syntax. Those lacking the understanding to make skilled selection of material to lift retained irrelevances such as reference to seabirds and the possible whereabouts or illness of the keepers.