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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01

Reading and Directed Writing

General comments

In general, Examiners considered that most candidates responded well to the reading material in this Paper with the result that many performed to a high standard. In particular, **Question 12**, the directed writing task, elicited some fluently written and convincing responses which indicated that the candidates had engaged enthusiastically with the material. Overall, the standard of writing of the majority of candidates was of an average to good standard and the improvement in this aspect of the work which was remarked on in the Report to Centres produced for the examination of May 2003 appears to have been sustained.

The response of candidates to the reading tasks on the Paper was more mixed and Examiners felt that the least successful responses occurred in answers to **Question 11**, the summary task. More detailed comments relating to this will be found later in this Report.

Only a very small number of candidates failed to complete the Paper adequately which would suggest that most allocated their time successfully. However, a small number of candidates appeared to have spent excessive time in producing first drafts of answers and then re-writing them neatly without making any textual changes to them; they would be better advised to spend this time in re-reading their first draft and making necessary revisions to it where appropriate; although Examiners appreciate well-presented answers, they also are aware that candidates are working under time constraints and have the impression that those candidates who spend too much time in drafting their responses are putting themselves under unnecessary pressure later in the Paper. It should also be mentioned in this context that Examiners generally find the candidates' presentational and handwriting skills to be of an at least satisfactory standard although there are still some Centres where the illegibility of candidates' handwriting significantly impedes the understanding of their responses.

One further, general point which also has a direct bearing on candidates' overall performance is the tendency among a very few Centres to allow candidates to write their responses on the Question Paper itself. This may be only a minor concern when the said Question Papers are passed on to the Examiner, but those (very often high-performing candidates) who answer the six multiple choice questions on the Question Paper and then fail to include it with their remaining responses seriously jeopardise their chances of gaining sufficient marks to obtain a C grade on this Paper.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Questions 1 - 6

The correct answers to these questions were as follows: **A, D, D, C, C** and **C**. Only a very few candidates succeeded in gaining all six marks here which would suggest that they were a little more demanding than in previous years. However, only a very small number of candidates failed to score fewer than two out of the six marks available. The most frequently incorrectly answered question was **Question 3** with answer **B** being the most common mistake. Responses to later questions suggested that many candidates had only a very vague idea of what was meant by the phrase "cult following".

Question 7

Only a small number of candidates succeeded in identifying all four points (or in successfully apportioning the points to the correct part of the question). The relevant facts about Christen's childhood were that he grew up on an island and that he started sailing at the age of five. Answers which referred to his having been sailing all his life, or that he started sailing when he was young, were not sufficiently specific. However, those who said that he started sailing when he was very young were fully rewarded.

The two reasons why he did not want to get involved in sailing round the world were that it was not his ambition to do so and he thought that those people who did so were crazy. Those candidates who used the phrases "never (his) goal" and "those guys were crazy" were awarded the two marks; however, the phrases were lifted from the question itself and stated as their answer that "he did not want to get involved with sailing around the world" were not!

Question 8

There were in fact six possible correct responses to this question and a pleasing number of candidates successfully identified four of them. There were few examples of unselective lifting from the passage and candidates appeared to have a good grasp of this section of the passage. The reasons given for why Christen liked sailing in the race were that he appreciates the beauties of nature; he likes feeling part of/close to nature; he likes the feeling of being small in a huge universe; he likes to feel lucky or privileged; he likes the speed/excitement of sailing and he likes the challenge of inventing strategies/routes. It should be noted that although many candidates scored highly on this question, there were a significant number who failed to do so through careless reading of the question which led to their confusing what was asked for here with what was asked for in question 9 and introducing reasons as to why Christen enjoyed making films on board.

Question 9

Again, there were six possible correct responses to this task and again, there were a significant number of candidates who confused what was required with the reasons given as answers to **Question 8**. Overall, this was not answered as successfully as the previous question as candidates appeared to find it more difficult to isolate and articulate clearly the relevant details. The required points were that making films on board the boat allowed good communications between the *crew* and their *families*; the films helped to make the sport popular (by creating a cult following); they allowed Christen to share his experiences with a wide audience; they were a good public relations vehicle; they allowed the crew to enjoy being stars in front of the camera. Only a few candidates succeeded in identifying the implied point that the films helped the company to be successful and to make money.

Question 10

Only a small number of candidates successfully explained both parts of the question. Many showed an understanding that Christen's position gave him some authority in his professional life but only a few went on to explain that on board the boat things are different as everyone is equal and all have to take orders.

Section B

Question 11

Overall, the responses to the summary task were the most disappointing part of the candidates' answers. The task was in two parts; the first asking for a summary of what Cameron did from the moment he ran off into the woods until the time he was rescued, and the second asking for a summary of the entire rescue procedure and what Cameron did after he was rescued. In general, candidates scored more highly on task **(b)** than on task **(a)**. The relevant points did not occur sequentially in the passage and so it was necessary for candidates to search for and sort out the appropriate details; this meant that it was difficult to accumulate marks by unselective lifting of material. However, this question revealed some significant limitations in candidates' summary writing technique. The most apparent was a failure to determine precisely which details should be included in which section with the result that many candidates failed to score marks in question **(b)** as they had already covered points relating to the complete rescue procedure in their answers to question **(a)**. Perhaps more seriously, a significant number of candidates failed to take note of the requirement to write within a limited number of words and merely retold Cameron's adventures in detail, from beginning to end, repeating material from question **(a)** in question **(b)**; Examiners were permitted to credit points once only (in the relevant section) and candidates who answered in this way did not score highly in the expression mark for the question. This is obviously an area on which Centres can concentrate and candidates should be advised to read both the passage and question carefully and then to concentrate on identifying and retrieving relevant points and organising them before attempting to produce their response. This is a section of the Paper which tests candidates' *reading* skills, although the evidence of many answers is that a large number of those taking the exam still feel that they have to start writing straightaway without giving themselves time to read and assimilate material. Those candidates who took a measured response to this task, selected material thoughtfully and then made an attempt to express their understanding concisely in their own words (or at least, through carefully selective lifting) were generally those who scored most successfully.

Question 12

Most candidates responded well to this task and revealed a pleasing ability and willingness to empathise with the feelings of Cameron's mother. There was very little evidence of misunderstanding of the passages (although quite a large number of candidates appeared to believe that dinosaurs and other unlikely beasts were common inhabitants of Scottish forests) and this produced some confident and convincing writing. Examiners in general commented on the improved quality of candidates' written expression this year and, as a result, were able to point to more sophisticated failings such as the inability to use a register fully appropriate to that of a diary. This is a significant comment as it means that Examiners are able to look beyond limitations of basic expression and consider the ways in which candidates respond to the task. Centres are to be congratulated on their efforts in encouraging candidates to improve their continuous writing skills (although this is not the main focus of assessment on this Paper).

Conclusion

The standard of the responses to the directed writing task was particularly pleasing and it is hoped that in future candidates will apply the same assiduousness to improving the level of their responses to the summary task by practising and concentrating on their reading techniques and ensuring that they focus on selecting relevant details.

Paper 0500/02

Reading and Directed Writing (Extended)

General comments

Most candidates showed an interest in the topics and the details of the passages set for study. Most read Passage A thoroughly and with care. Passage B was more inferential and difficult. Candidates sometimes failed to identify the writer's attitudes correctly, particularly those expressed about the teenage crew. The effort spent on reading Passage A was not sustained on Passage B.

Candidates, in many cases scored well on **Question 1** and focused well on both the passages and the question. Their answers to **Question 2** were variable. Although they correctly based their answers on what they had read in the passages, they did not always answer the detail of the question.

The material for **Question 3** was easier to understand despite Joy's idiosyncratic style of language. However, candidates needed to reorder the information given in the passage and to cast it in a recognisable form of a newspaper report. These tasks were carried out with varying degrees of success.

There was a tendency for candidates to revert to bad habits of copying whole phrases and sentences from the passages, not only in the summary but also in the conversation in the answer to **Question 2**. Centres have worked hard in the last few years to eradicate this. Recent Reports on the Examination have therefore not stressed the importance of the use of candidates' own words as far as is possible. However, the Examiners have now noted the problem once more, and Centres are asked to make it quite clear to candidates.

Many candidates sensibly wrote some sort of a plan before finalising their answers. However, some of the plans were long and complex and, in some cases, may have taken up too much of the time. The best planning was a combination of thinking and remembering and writing. Written plans consisting of a word or two at a time rather than a complex sentence were more effective. The translation of the original into the candidates' own words was probably better done in the head than in note form.

There were only very rare examples of unfinished scripts. However, a few candidates did not complete their answers to **Question 3** and some of the articles bore the signs of too much speed and not enough care. The reasons for this may have been that candidates spent a good deal of time working out the detail of Passages A and B, which was understandable. Overlong plans and occasional first drafts may also have contributed to poor time management. Some answers to both **Questions 1** and **2** were very long, which left less writing time for the answer to the last question.

The Examiners made several comments about the quality of handwriting. With the greater use of word-processing, this is bound to become a problem. Examiners are reminded of their duty to read and to understand everything that is put in front of them, but illegible handwriting puts candidates at a disadvantage if their work cannot be read fluently and meaning can be lost.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Summarise what you think Christen Horn Johannessen finds enjoyable about taking part in the Volvo Ocean Race and what Libby Purves says about the hard work and discomforts of sailing in tall ships.

There were twenty-one points in the mark scheme, and candidates could score full marks for content by identifying fifteen. Most candidates worked hard to summarise points in Passage A, but only the better answers scored highly from Passage B. This was more complex, and candidates had to search diligently for suitable answers.

This was not, of course, a summary of everything in the passages. Not every candidate read the question thoroughly enough to note the words 'enjoyable' and 'hard work and discomforts'. Their answers therefore contained irrelevant material.

Many of the answers were too long. The first thing to learn about a summary is the word '*short*'. Candidates were asked to write about a side, allowing for the size of their handwriting. This means that a person who writes approximately eight words to a line writes about a side, a person with very large writing and who writes about five words to a line, writes about a side and a third, and a person with small handwriting and who writes about twelve words to a line, writes rather less than a side. In fact, the average hand-writer will fill a side with approximately 250 words. However, in this exam, the Examiners do not count words and do not wish candidates to waste their time doing so; they are only concerned when they see answers that are obviously too long. These answers also draw attention because they are too wordy, that is they are not written concisely. One candidate wrote four sides. The second word to learn about a summary is therefore '*concise*'.

Some candidates wrote long introductions to their answers, often lasting six lines. Others, fewer in number, provided a repetitive final paragraph. These were wholly inappropriate. The example given below shows clearly how the summary should begin, using the key words from the question.

Examiners usually mark generalisations, but nearly always allow examples to be used. For example, candidates could use 'passing the Cape' as an alternative to 'beautiful sights seen during the race'.

Some candidates were careless about using their own words. Single words, like 'strategies' or 'media stars' were of course not a problem, but there were examples of whole phrases and sentences that were often copied out, thus giving no proof that they had been understood. Common examples were:

- 'You get very close to nature, and moments like these remind you how small you are in the scheme of things...'
- 'There was much to induce seasickness.'
- '...fantasised constantly about our bunks.'

The third word/phrase to learn about a summary is therefore '*own words*'.

In addition to the fifteen marks available for content, there were, as usual, five marks for the presentation of the summary. Candidates who wrote at excessive length or who copied extensively from the passages could easily score none of these. In fact, the two faults in summary writing went together: candidates who wrote at length were often those who copied.

The following example shows how all twenty-one points can be included in a summary of approximately 200 words. It also shows clearly how the two parts of the summary should begin. There was no requirement to compare the two passages and that the two sections are completed separately, in line with the requirements of the task.

*'Christen Johannessen finds taking part in the Volvo Ocean Race **enjoyable** because of experiences like those of watching the stars, which make him feel a very small part in the pattern of nature. There are also magnificent natural sights to be seen during the race. All this makes him feel lucky to be there. He enjoys travelling at speed and planning out the progress of his boat during the race. Another attraction is the chance to make films and become a media star. It is a way of communicating with families and with the public at large. Sailing is a welcome change from his normal job.*

The main **discomforts** of sailing in tall ships are seasickness and lack of sleep. Libby Purves says that she cannot sleep more than a few hours because of the long watches, having to do her work at odd hours and being called on deck to make repairs. She feels she must take on extra work because she fears the task of climbing aloft. While the ship is relatively comfortable, some tall ships have hammocks. The weather is mostly bad: it is miserably cold, it rains most of the time and there are howling gales.

Question 2

Write the words of a conversation in which Libby Purves and Christen Horn Johannessen discuss their experiences of sailing. During the conversation they discuss: what they have learned about themselves; the teenagers who were on the *Europa*. Start your conversation like this: Libby: Why do we do these crazy things?

Candidates are reminded that Paper 2 is chiefly a *reading* paper. The form of a conversation was chosen because the Examiners wanted candidates to explore the experiences and views of the two people as they could be detected and inferred from an intelligent reading of the passages.

Most candidates wrote good conversations. There were comparatively few that were simple question-and-answer sessions or where ideas were simply thrown backwards and forwards. These conversations had shape and order, and there were usually examples of extended contributions.

Some attempt was made to create character. Johannessen was shown as an outward-going, determined man with a gentle side to him. Purves was sometimes wrongly depicted as person who had much to worry about and who felt that she had not gained much from her experience. Good candidates made a much more positive interpretation of her account, and therefore represented her faithfully. Those who scored poorly on the second passage in **Question 1** were those most likely to misinterpret the passage in their answer here.

There were examples of wasted time and space. The most flagrant of these were creative answers founded more on make-believe than on what had been read. One candidate invented a series of amusing accidents caught on film, and some really unpleasant jibes at mishaps to the teenagers. Another fault was to take up a good deal of the conversation with social niceties such as inviting Libby to sail on Christen's boat. A third fault was to extend an idea at length without adding anything new to it. Candidates are reminded that **Question 2** tests the ability to detect relevant ideas and to explore them as directed in the question.

Some candidates did not get beyond providing a general discussion of experiences of sailing. However, nearly all addressed the opening remark about craziness. Examiners credited positive comments from Johannessen about the joys of sailing and a more negative approach from Purves. Some candidates extended and revisited this aspect of the question throughout their answers and developed their ideas well into extended conversation. Others dealt with the idea of craziness abruptly, sometimes saying that they could not think of a suitable answer.

The first of the bullets - 'what they have learned about themselves' - was sometimes completely neglected. Good candidates dwelt on it, and it was here that their portrayal of Purves came into its own. She was made to acknowledge her own inner strength, her sense of achievement and what she had learned by comparing herself with the teenagers.

Less good candidates found the reference to the teenagers difficult. There were many examples of failure to see their enthusiasm and determination. A cursory reading provided the interpretation that they came unprepared and were then seasick. They took the example of the girl who retired to her bunk for the whole week as typical of them all. Examiners expected a more careful reading and the ability to make responsible inferences from what had been read. Good candidates emphasised the inner strength of young people who had made sacrifices to come on board and who were not always physically fit to take on such hardships - yet they did. They recognised Purves' respect for them.

The lesson here is that in this question, always the most difficult of the three on the Paper, it is essential to focus on the detail of the question and on the passages. There was a real weakness in following the requirements of the question, which, coupled with a weakness in dealing with the second passage, meant that many candidates scored poorly. Candidates who dealt with all three requirements with some development scored highly.

Question 3

A transcript of an interview in which Joy Wambugu describes how she rescued a young boy from a pool.

You are a newspaper reporter. Invent a suitable headline and write your report of the incident for Saturday paper. You may quote some of Joy's words, but the report should be in your own words and in written, not spoken English. You must also decide on the order of the material you use from the transcript. Your editor believes in young people and wants his newspaper to note the good things that they do. You should therefore include some comments about Joy's actions.

It was important to read the question carefully and to use the material as required. There were many candidates who did not. A small number did not even supply a headline, and the comments on Joy's actions were often thin and unlikely to please the editor. Some candidates did not work out a suitable order. The commonest error was to split up the account of what actually happened into several sections. Many candidates thought Joy was a boy. This did not affect any of the marks, but a careful reading of the Examination Paper would have made her gender quite clear.

There was some evidence that candidates had been taught something about what a newspaper report looked like, but there were only rare examples of the use of an appropriate register.

Common errors were:

- over-use of long quotations from the transcript: an editor would expect good judgement in the selection of brief and telling examples of what was said;
- failure to use reported speech; readers would be used to a mixture of direct and indirect speech, and candidates should be taught to handle both;
- the use of the first person, as in 'I talked to Joy when she came for an interview';
- failure to identify Ms Njoba and Mr Kivuti when referring to them.

A sensible order to choose was as follows:

- headline, followed by a brief, introductory paragraph to encapsulate the incident: both could be used to establish an angle on the story, such as heroism, or miracle (referring to the set of lucky chances that led to the saving of the child);
- a succinct account of the events in the candidate's own words, to include Mr Kivuti;
- comments on the part played by Ms Njoba and the importance of lifesaving and swimming;
- Joy's mother's comments;
- an evaluation of Joy's actions and her example of what teenagers can achieve.

Good candidates adopted this order, or one very similar to it. They were also able to create a good opening paragraph, and did not immediately embark on the series of events.

A few candidates laid out their paragraphs excellently, and used sub-headings to some effect. By contrast, amazingly, some candidates attempted to write without using any paragraphs at all.

It was surprising how few candidates took the opportunity to support teenagers. Most wrote about Joy's achievements, and emphasises her modesty. It was left to mature candidates to comment on her actions in the context of what teenagers could do.

While many of the headlines were mundane, such as 'Girl saves Boy' or prosaically long, others showed humour and imagination. They included: Superteen saves Samuel; Humble Joy saves Little Boy; Jump for Joy; Deep Pool Bravery; It's Joy to be Alive; Tanga Teenager Tugs Toddler from Tragedy.

The Examiners appreciated these and others like them.

Paper 0500/03
Continuous Writing

General comments

Apart from **Questions 2** and **7**, all the topics were popular choices. Good candidates paid attention to detail and used plenty of relevant examples for support in discursive topics and a wide range of descriptive devices and demonstrated a tight control of narratives. Poor candidates had little knowledge of discursive topics and soon ran out of relevant material, confused description with narrative, and wrote shapeless stories with too much event and not enough description or account of characters' feelings to involve the reader.

The Examiners noted the importance of planning, particularly of discursive responses, to ensure that the candidate did not run out of material or write repetitiously. However, the writing of a first draft followed by a copied final version was not recommended, since the final version rarely added anything to the first and sometimes caused timing difficulties. Candidates are advised to write a simple plan on their examination Papers or scripts before they start to write. They are also recommended to plan in their heads, so that they know the words they are going to write in advance and do not have to spend time editing.

Some candidates wrote at too great a length; there were several responses that lasted four sides. Few of these were of consistent quality, and it was rare that anything of note was added after the first two and a half sides. It was quite common for the Examiners to discover an increase in error at the end of these long pieces, and this reduced the final mark. Another problem was that, as the writing became more hurried, so the choice of language and the use of effective grammatical devices lessened. This was in contrast to candidates who wrote at a more reasonable length. With enough time to spare, their writing often increased in quality as they realised the potential of their choice of content.

The Examiners stressed the importance of neat work. Some scripts were barely legible and the handwriting often appeared hurried, particularly in a long response. Sometimes the appearance and also the accuracy of the work grew worse on the last side. Candidates are reminded of the importance of consistency. Some candidates edited their work extensively. There was no harm in this, but the process was often untidy with multiple crossings out. Altered words were sometimes extremely difficult to read and occasionally the editing gave rise to further errors.

Some Examiners reported an improvement in paragraphing. Most paragraphs were of a satisfactory length and only a few candidates started a new paragraph for every sentence. There were still too many candidates who did not use full stops correctly at the end of sentences. These errors occurred particularly where the next sentence started with a pronoun. There were common errors of tense and the correct use of prepositions. Spelling was often good. Some candidates had been told to use imposing vocabulary, but did not know the meaning of the words that they used. Teachers are recommended to monitor their candidates' acquisition of vocabulary and advise them accordingly.

Candidates did not always use language consistently. As a rule, they are advised to use a formal register common to that of well-written English. If they wish to use a non-standard register they should do so consistently and with style. There were many examples where Standard English was interspersed with colloquialisms that could not be ascribed to regional dialect or idiom.

Candidates are advised to think carefully about how to write stories. There were some very dull documentary-type narratives that did not create interest because they contained too many events and because there was no expression of feeling. The time span was often too long. The best stories involved the reader in moving events and used description to allow the reader access to the narrative. One Examiner recommended that thought should be given to the time span, a one-conflict situation and to a restriction on the number of characters, say no more than four.

Much of the narrative and description involved violence. If violent events are included they should be handled with care. Too much violence lost its effect. Naturally much of it sounded unreal and, in some cases, there was so much of it that the reader was amused rather than shocked.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The Rebel

This was a very popular and, in some cases, provocative topic. While there was some imaginative and original work, probing the feelings both of the rebel and of the people nearest to him or her, many of the stories were either of naughty boys or girls creating mayhem for their teachers and parents, or tales of military rebels fighting unjust regimes. The worst approach was biographical, written as a piece of information, usually competently, but offering no real interest to the reader. The best accounts were those that were nearest to the emotions and psychology of the rebel. Some accounts descended into violence and were not necessarily effective. This topic was generally done at least satisfactorily and often well.

Question 2

Write a story in which a failure to communicate is important

This was one of the least popular choices. Many of the candidates who attempted it wrote stories about events that would have been different had the mobile phone been working properly. One candidate fell down a hole in a mountainside and died because the rescue team could not be called. Some of these stories were quite unreal, whereas the rare stories about people who found communication with each other difficult were more effective. Many stories were predictable in their endings in drugs, alcohol, divorce and death. Some candidates wrote touching stories about children who failed to contact grandparents before it was too late. These pieces were of an average quality.

Question 3

'Dangerous sports must be banned'. What do you think?

This topic attracted many sporting candidates, most of whom argued that such sports should not be banned. Some responses were quite good, taking two or three major sports, like rugby, football and boxing, and showing how they could cause players danger, but weighing this against the proper controls and safety measures that were in force. They considered the loss to society if they were banned. These arguments were developed and there was enough material to last the length of the writing without repetition. Poor responses usually listed a large number of sports and wrote very little about any of them. There was little argument for the reader to follow and material was often repeated. Lack of knowledge led to poor writing. The quality of the writing ranged from good to poor, but most candidates wrote poorly.

Question 4

Write a description of a busy scene outside a stadium before or after a big event

Many candidates wrote about this topic and there was much good description of people, ticket booths, sellers of various wares and atmospheres of hot, cold, concern, joy and violence. Some of the writing ran out of material before the end. This could have been prevented by the use of a plan. The writing was enhanced by a very small amount of narrative, such as moving from the end of a very long queue to the turnstiles, or the faintest hint of a minor disturbance, which, in the best writing, turned to nothing, but caused some fear among the people. Many took the title as an excuse for bloodshed, dead policemen and smashed houses. One candidate asserted that this happened every Sunday afternoon. However, violence was not always out of place. There was a moving account of the loss of a child, parted from her mother when the crowd moved forward. The writing was satisfactory to good.

Question 5

'No money should be spent on things like space research while there are people in the world going hungry'. What do you think?

The best accounts dealt with both elements of the quotation, either providing a good case against space research or pointing out the necessities of knowing about our universe, at least because we might become victims of an asteroid. However, not many candidates knew much about space research and its benefits. Only rarely did anyone suggest that the two things were not comparable. As with **Question 3**, many of the answers ran out of material after a side, or the thread of the argument became extremely difficult to follow. This writing included some excellent argument, but most attempts were average or below.

Question 6

'She couldn't help smiling to herself when she thought of what had just happened'... Continue the story.

This question, with **The Rebel**, was the most popular topic. The Examiners suspect that in some cases stories that had been written as practice essays were adapted to this title. There was certainly a great variety of content, some of it very tenuously linked to the title. One common peculiarity was that the person who was smiling turned out to be the victim of great tragedy. Presumably this was a matter of smiling in the face of adversity, but candidates rarely took the trouble to make the link between the opening lines and the narrative that followed clear. There were simple stories such as receiving good examination results, and vengeful stories in which women beat men at their own game. One unpleasant girl met her fate by falling face first into her own birthday cake. There was again a good deal of murder, congealed blood and body bags. Many of the stories were about stealing girl friends. Candidates are advised that a light touch gives the best effect. Some supposedly serious narratives raised a different sort of smile from the one intended by the candidate. However, most of this writing was satisfactory to good.

Question 7

Describe what you think it would be like to spend some time on the moon

This was the other unpopular question, although it was done quite well by the brave candidates who attempted it. It either needed some general knowledge or a vivid imagination. Some very good answers were real fantasy trips and bore no relation to reality. They made the moon fit what the candidates wanted it to be. There were some excellent accounts of a possible arrival, the sight that would meet their eyes, and details of their subsequent life there. One candidate described the moon as 'a frosty garden of Eden'. The responses to this topic were among the most original seen for some time and were satisfactory to good.

Question 8

'Celebrities are now more important than parents and teachers in guiding people's ambitions - and that is a bad situation'. What do you think?

Like **Question 5** this topic had two elements, firstly celebrities and secondly parents and teachers. Candidates were well advised to use both so that a possible structure for the writing was the influence of celebrities for the first section, the importance of the examples of teachers and parents for the second and finally, the candidate's own views. Many of the essays were done well. The dangers of unstable relationships, of drugs and of eating disorders were explained at some length and there were also examples of how celebrities could give young people the will to succeed as well as mentioning their charitable work. Some candidates failed to balance this by thinking through the more mundane but constant and focused attention of teachers and parents. There was plenty to say, and candidates felt far more at home with this topic than with **Question 3** and **Question 5**. The writing was average to good.

Question 9

Write a story in which one of the people in the photograph opposite is the central character'.

This was not commonly answered, but there were some touching stories about the birth of calves, described by one Examiner as 'gentle, homely tales'. One such story involved a couple who inherited a farm. The man would not go near the cows until one night there was an emergency and he had to assist with the birth of a calf. From that day on all was well. Some mature candidates chose this topic to write about the ravages of foot-and-mouth disease. Most of the writing was satisfactory.

Final comments

As usual, this report ends with recommendations for the use of the Paper for practice writing. On this occasion there are no topics which did not work well. However, the best stories were from **Questions 1** and **6**; **Question 8** was the best essay subject, while **Question 4** (both options) produced some excellent descriptions. With the benefit of class discussion and the help of the Teacher, **Question 7** should definitely be attempted.

Paper 0500/04**Continuous Writing (Coursework)****General comments**

The standard of writing was high and there were very few examples of failure to fulfil the requirements of the Syllabus.

The Moderators noted the importance of the candidates' personal involvement in their assignments. On the whole, they wrote better arguments if they believed strongly in the topics. It was better if they gave their own views rather than repeating those of others. This meant writing in the first person, not something that every Centre recommends. However, abstract arguments sounded false when compared with something that was a real issue near at hand, or an issue of wider significance but which affected the candidate's life and emotions. Many candidates were personally involved in their own stories, controlling events and developing registers and voices to attract their readers.

For this reason, Centres should be wary of giving everyone in a class the same assignments. Some element of choice is important so that personal thought or imagination is encouraged.

There were still examples of using questions from past IGCSE Papers. In one case, using passages about water management, the writing was successful because the Centre invented some new tasks and because there were enough ideas in the two passages to form the basis of some imaginative writing. In another case, using the passage about the youth parliament, there was limited material for folder work, and the task did not allow much development. With all the possibilities open to any Centre, it should not be necessary to use Past Papers.

The Moderators give this advice to Centres for 2004: encourage your candidates to think and write for themselves as individuals to achieve the most from this component.

Comments on task setting

Nearly all Centres set varied tasks, which gave opportunities for candidates to use different styles. Most of the tasks were challenging and complex, which allowed the award of the whole range of the marks.

Diaries were not always successful. The best adopted a voice that added something to the range of expression demonstrated in the other pieces. However, it was easy for the language to become mundane, the writer using a style of writing that was carelessly that of everyday speech and which offered nothing special to the reader. The best diaries were those that had an attractive register, some interesting narrative content (though this could be fragmented) and not many entries. In diaries that had few entries, each one could be substantial enough for events, thoughts and feelings to be developed.

Some good talking-head tasks were set. These weighed ideas sensibly and developed a line of thought, as distinct from 'stream of consciousness' writing. This was rarely successful because the language faltered and the content consisted of feelings without anything to hold it together. One Centre set tasks in which characters from *Romeo and Juliet* gave their thoughts and feelings. In an attempt to use 'old' language the candidates distanced themselves from the reality of the characters. To do this type of exercise, candidates must be able to think themselves into what happens to characters and how they feel. The candidate who wrote a soliloquy given by Eric in *An Inspector Calls*, understood the modern character far more clearly and was able to speak convincingly in his language.

Both personal expressive writing and fiction benefited by unexpected and/or neatly expressed endings. Many candidates took care over both the beginnings and the ends of their stories.

Several Centres wrote their first piece in the form of a speech. There were few examples of using the spoken form just for the sound of the language. Many were persuasive because they used some form of rhetoric to manipulate argument and not to be chatty. Centres could well go down this route to avoid some of the more abstract and unexciting essays.

There were examples of drama scripts. The best of these were those that provided real drama and used different tones of voice and varieties of spoken language. The provision of stage effects was essential. The use of conversation (as set in Paper 2 of the examination) was an alternative to the dramatic form, but the Moderators only recommend this where candidates respond to reading material.

Some specific tasks that worked well for individual Centres were:

- stories called 'The Escape' and stories about time;
- an argumentative piece about road safety in Botswana;
- an article proposing the abolition of the teachers' smoking area;
- a letter to the editor of a newspaper about a local (non European) issue of asylum seeking;
- a speech from Colombia about children's rights;
- restaurant reviews;
- reviews of the latest film version of *Romeo and Juliet*;
- 'The Dark Side of the Moon': a piece of writing in diary form interspersed with sections of narrative;
- a war story that was *not* based on the First World War;
- further adventures of Gulliver, which included a visit to the Land of the All-Girls Bands: these stories retained Swift's characterisation and at least a touch of satire.

Some tasks that did not work so well in demonstrating the strengths of candidates were:

- a newspaper report based on events in Steinbeck's *The Pearl*: this produced writing that was considerably shallower than the book itself;
- an application for a job: this was not a strong test of language, content or structure;
- 'A day in the life of...': this task rarely results in good writing, perhaps because of the limitations of the originals, which tend to include some mundane content;
- attempts to use tabloid journalese: this looks easy when it is read but is extremely difficult to write convincingly.

Matters of assessment

The assessments were largely accurate. Most Centres discriminated between their candidates' writing well and did not try to over-estimate the performances of their weaker candidates. They were almost always accurate in judging content and structure. Problems of assessment were caused by the failure to appreciate the importance of constructing fluent sentences and of using a wide range of apt vocabulary.

Some Centres were over-ambitious for candidates whose use of language was not secure. In one case, candidates who were given marks in the high thirties used inappropriate language that was too complex for the content of their writing, resulting in sections that were not easy to understand.

Other Centres tried to spread their candidates too widely and were generous at the top of the range, but severe at the bottom. In some cases, candidates who were given low marks still used a reasonable vocabulary and made few mistakes. Their only fault appeared to be in the length and development of the work.

There were several cases of bunching marks. The commonest was to give several good candidates a top mark of 38. Where this happened, it was often possible to find at least one folder that could have been given 39 or 40. In the case of excellent work, Centres should not withhold the mark of 40 without good reason.

When marking and moderating folders, Centres should remember that the ability to construct sentences, some of them complex, and to use a wide range of varied and appropriate vocabulary are useful discriminators. The Moderators also expect candidates to have proofread their work. There were some glaring examples of failure to do this and of Centres that had not taken this into consideration when allocating marks.

The Moderators expect evidence of the assessment of each piece of writing. This includes errors and stylistic awkwardness as well as the acknowledgement of examples of good expression and inclusion of effective subject matter. There should also be a comment at the end of each piece, covering content, expression and accuracy, and, for the candidate's sake, presentation. There were examples of Centres that had put no comments on work at all, thus making it hard for Moderators to understand what particular marks had been given.

Centres are reminded of their responsibility to ensure that candidates' work is their own. There were many examples of erudite essays that did not appear to be in the style of the rest of the folder and which may not have been wholly original. The Moderators do not expect candidates to copy out whole sentences from other sources except as a quotation.

Final comments

Centres are reminded that the Syllabus requirements for coursework have been modified for the examination in June 2005 onwards. The main difference is that the third piece in the folder will now have to be a response to reading material chosen by the Centre and that marks will be available for the candidate's reading and writing. Centres will find details in the Syllabus for 2005 and in the new edition of the Coursework Training Manual.

Paper 0500/05

Speaking/Listening Option

General comments

Moderators remarked that the standard of performance was generally secure and sometimes impressive. There was evidence that candidates at *all levels* of achievement were seeking to become more involved in the role plays and contribute more to the conversations. This is excellent news and is a promising step forward for this component.

Administrative procedures were completed generally well, with most Centres helping to make the external moderation process as easy as possible. It is pleasing, therefore, to have to focus on only two areas that require more attention:

- A surprising number of Centres are still failing to record a mark out of ten on the Mark Sheet. The Moderators found that they had to complete a number of Amendment Forms because marks had been transcribed incorrectly; recording marks out of a hundred is the most common error, but Moderators also saw totals out of twenty and thirty. The method of arriving at the final mark is explained in the *Teacher/Examiner's Notes* booklet on page twelve and also on the reverse of the Summary Form. If Centres are using photocopied Summary Forms, it would be wise to copy both sides of the Form.
- A few Centres are still conducting a 'warm-up' phase before the main test. Please note that this is not necessary; indeed, *Centres need record only the two parts of the test*. There is no need to record any instructions to candidates, any periods of silence while candidates are considering the role play cards. When additional material is recorded, it makes the task of external moderation more cumbersome.

Comments on specific questions

The Role Play

As in previous sessions, a number of Teachers handled the role plays with expertise, adopting realistic and authentic roles and allowing candidates every chance to respond appropriately and to extend the role playing. It was apparent at these Centres that role playing, and in particular, strategies of response, had been practised.

There was again a variety of styles of role playing, from the very realistic and serious approach to the very informal and often casual approach. In all cases, it did not matter which style an Examiner adopted. The main aim of this section is to test the candidates' skills in fulfilling their roles convincingly.

Centres are reminded that it is permissible to expand the role play scenario if they feel that in doing so candidates will be able to illustrate their oral and aural skills further.

The Conversation

Moderators are happy to report that this session saw more examples of interesting conversations about topics and issues that candidates had clearly given a great deal of thought to. In these cases, evidence of planning and preparation was apparent, and the test served as a means by which candidate and Examiner could conduct a discussion.

There were fewer topics which were purely factual or anecdotal, and more which were 'open' (often of a social or political nature) stimulating debate and producing discussion. Many Examiners were happy to engage in lively discussion, which should be the aim of this part of the Test.

It follows, therefore, that candidates arriving at the test venue who have not prepared properly will, in most cases, struggle to satisfy the vigour of the assessment criteria. However, Moderators did not encounter any cases of candidates who were completely unprepared, and this is a promising improvement.

There are still a few cases of 'conversations' which are essentially speeches. Examiners should ensure that candidates who are seeking to talk continuously are stopped, and that conversation prevails. The Moderators would like to commend those Examiners who do this. It should be noted that a candidate who talks continuously but aimlessly is still delivering a 'speech' and should be prompted to engage in productive dialogue.

In most cases, however, the conversations were conducted in a generally competent manner and candidates spoke easily and at length about their chosen topics.

Assessment

Moderators again reported a very pleasing degree of accuracy in the application of the assessment criteria. In the majority of cases, there was no need to make any adjustment to the marks awarded. Adjustments that were made tended to be the result of lenient marking. Please remember that both sets of criteria do demand that candidates make an effort *to involve themselves in productive dialogue*.

<p>Paper 0500/06 Speaking/Listening Coursework</p>
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General comments

In the ideal portfolio of coursework, a Moderator will see a candidate completing three different tasks, each with a different audience in mind. It would be very pleasing to see that candidates have been involved in group discussions and pair-work, in addition to making individual presentations.

Moderators report that this is being achieved by only a few Centres. If more Centres could work towards a greater variety of activities, this can only result in strengthening the component further.

Comments on specific aspects

Tasks

Some Centres should avoid setting tasks which are similar and should adopt an approach which seeks to offer *three quite different tasks*. There is, of course, a place for the individual task - but this should be enhanced by tasks which invite candidates to work together.

Procedural obligations

Procedures were generally followed well. Tape quality was fine and sampling was accurately presented.

Assessment

Moderators noted that a degree of severity occurred in one case where task-setting was restrictive. To engage with the assessment criteria appropriately and fully, a variety of activities should be undertaken.

Advice to Centres

A Moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a Centre's coursework: initially to confirm the Centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that a variety of appropriate tasks have been completed. For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres should submit a recording of each candidate engaged in a discussion, a conversation, or a role play. This might be with a Teacher/Examiner or it might be with another candidate. (Larger Centres will, of course, send a representative sample.)

In addition to the above, it would be useful if Centres were to include one recording of any group discussions that have taken place.

It is not useful for the External Moderators to receive presentations or speeches as the only examples of oral coursework.

There is still some confusion at one or two Centres about the selection of appropriate Coursework. In these cases, it is recommended that candidates are entered for the Speaking and Listening Test (0500/05). This comprises two parts: a Role Play, and a Conversation (on a topic prepared by the candidate prior to the Test).