

English Language

General Certificate of Secondary Education J355

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

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A651 Extended Literary Text and Imaginative Writing

General Comments

There were fewer candidates submitting work than in previous January sessions. The move to an all-linear qualification and the change to the notification to candidates of marks rather than grades this time affected numbers in this way, we assume.

Notwithstanding the fewer numbers, moderators reported that the quality of the work was as good if not better than previously. Again, this may well reflect a greater maturity in the candidates and greater experience of teaching this part of the specification. I would also hope that the effects of centre visits, twilight training sessions and the like are becoming clearer in the work produced.

Tasks, Texts and Responses

Almost all the work on texts was, again, on "Of Mice and Men". Some candidates wrote about "Romeo and Juliet", "Tsotsi", Duffy and Armitage. Pleasingly, many candidates had chosen to explore their text by way of one of the themed tasks, more usually "How does the writer create a memorable climax to a text you have studied?" In this case it was especially refreshing to see that candidates did not simply take "climax" to mean "the end". Instead many gained credit in using the task as a prompt to explore the structure of their chosen text. This enabled candidates to access the higher bands (3 and above) where structure is specifically asked for in the relevant band descriptors.

The relevant band 4-6 descriptor is "understands and demonstrates how meaning is conveyed". In band 3 and above this is developed to include "evaluating (commenting on/ making judgements about) language and structure as appropriate" (in ways that are relevant to task and text). Such an approach would certainly be beneficial to all candidates, irrespective of their choice of task and text in so far that they can talk about language and structure throughout the piece: rather than focusing exclusively on the former.

This first themed task worked to palpably good effect in "Romeo and Juliet" where candidates took Act Three Scene One as the memorable climax. They were able to give a very thorough and well supported analysis of what is an arresting but accessibly compact moment in the play and to go on and see the scene in the context of the overall shape and structure of the play to chart its causes and effects. The same approach worked very well on the fight between Curley and Lennie in "Of Mice and Men".

The vast majority of work, however, focussed on "How does Steinbeck explore different attitudes to women in the novel?"

It was pleasing to see the high quality of most of the responses to this, given the views it attracted as the successor task to the very well received "disadvantaged characters" in the previous sessions. The best answers gave clear and well supported accounts of not only Curley's wife but also the contrasts provided by Aunt Clara and, on the other hand, the finer distinctions between Susy and Clara, their establishments and employees. Good answers made clear and distinctive separations between not only these characters but also the attitudes of the (some of the) male characters. Strong links were made between the way Candy's weakness of character shapes his attitude to Curley's wife and Slim's strength allows him to take a different view. The ways in which the attitudes of George and, on the other hand, Lennie to Curley's wife are driven and formed also gave rise to much acute analysis.

Less successful responses, as so often in this Unit, were shaped rather more by perceptions of the social context than of the meat of the text.

To repeat what has been said in successive Reports to Centres: references to Social/Cultural/Historical context are not sought here and are not required. They do not necessarily detract from the merits of a response but they rarely enhance it. This is especially true of received, often generic comments, which tend to become clichés. For example, “all women in this period were housewives or prostitutes” is actually written quite often and is not helpful. Much better to explore the attitudes the men have to the prostitutes as presented in the text and link that to the way their loneliness shapes the double standard that they have in respect of both Aunt Clara and Susy .

Whilst all this good practice is to be welcomed and encouraged it is still disappointing that so few candidates explore alternative texts. Those writing on Shakespeare all did so on “Romeo and Juliet”. Those who did not take the themed task (as referred to above) wrote with confidence and to good effect on “two or three of the older generation” in the play. Almost all chose Capulet and the Friar and sometimes added points on the Nurse. Generally what was said was clearer on the characters than on “their roles in the play’s tragic conclusion”. This latter part of the task might, in some cases, have been developed more fully, especially with regard to what is said and done in the final scene.

Imaginative Writing

Much the more popular of the two writing tasks was “The Last Time”. As we hoped, this prompt elicited a very wide range of material and approaches to its development. The best work was generally (but by no means exclusively) drawn in the first instance from personal experience and worked up from a very well anchored starting point.

Especially pleasing was the fact that very few candidates were tempted to write derivative accounts of war, bloodshed and extermination. Much sensitivity and well-discriminated choices were the order of the day and teachers are to be congratulated on steering candidates in directions that often displayed compassion, sympathy and awe in convincing and authentic detail.

The satellite tasks followed 1-3 in order of popularity. There was an encouraging lack of derivation and pre-supposed formality in the writing of biographies and autobiographies: accounts were clear and direct. Those who chose the interview or leaflet formats had done so consciously, regardless of the degree of direct connection with “The Last Time”.

It is pleasing to see that very few candidates wrote at too great a length or attempted to emulate literary sub genres, the Tolkien style saga, for example.

Good tests of the merit of a candidate’s writing are often:-

- The degree of control there has been in shaping and developing the chosen (raw) material of the piece: is this greater or lesser than the sum of its parts? How completely integrated are its different (and quite possibly disparate) elements?
- The range and appropriateness of the vocabulary: is it apt, precise, well separated and lacking repetition?

Finally centres and candidates are to be congratulated on the freshness, originality and enthusiasm that characterised much of the work that moderators read.

Administrative Matters

Centres were successful and accurate in the moderation process. Moderators had little to disagree with in band, mark or rank order. Moderation is clearly being carried out with increasing competence and confidence.

Otherwise there is little new to report here.

A very few centres were quite late in submitting moderation samples: but many more were pleasingly prompt, allowing moderation to be done over the Christmas holidays, at least in part.

There is still occasional disparity between very fully completed paperwork and a paucity of annotation on scripts to show exactly where and how marks have been awarded. Where paperwork was incomplete or in error centres were very prompt and efficient in supplying what moderators required.

Some centres had not moved on to the new tasks: and had to seek the Awarding Body's retrospective permission to submit the original ones.

The ascription and recording of marks for the writing tasks: separate marks for the different AOs for each piece, then totalled and averaged was carried out very efficiently in this session.

We are grateful to centres for their efficiency and close cooperation.

A652A Speaking and Listening

General Comments

With many centres choosing not to enter candidates at this stage, the entry was, as expected, fairly small. The Terminal Rule allows centres to use any of the Controlled Assessment units for final assessment, so some centres were obviously deferring their entry for this unit, until June.

Task setting

Centres are experienced in task setting to cover the requirements of the three different contexts. However the requirement of the “real-life context in and beyond the classroom” is still proving problematic for some centres, despite being well into the life of the specification.

This is not an extra to the basic three contexts, but must be included as an aspect of any one of them; at the discretion of a centre, as appropriate to the situation. Centres must adapt and/or develop new activities to take this requirement into account, and while the majority of centres have embraced this requirement with imaginative and enabling tasks, some centres need to review their task setting.

The “real-life” context is more than just subject matter, which has to extend beyond the classroom; rather it is a matter of purpose and audience. Centres with successful tasks for this requirement often link this context with the drama-focussed context or role play of some form: mock interviews; reality shows; representatives of charities or pressure groups. However centres must be careful if using the drama-focussed context, that the original stimulus is not literary based or specifically a drama text. One example submitted was a court room scene based on “Of Mice and Men”, with characters from the novel. This and tasks like it cannot be classed as “real-life” and are not valid activities for the ‘real-life context’.

Some centres were able to give their candidates an actual “real-life” activity: presentations to parents, Heads and governors, prospective students; interviews; radio broadcasts. These were often, but not exclusively, centres with a small entry.

Similarly tasks submitted which were not valid were general discussions on various topics, or social and moral issues, or a talk to the class per se.

Attention is drawn, for further support and guidance, to the documents on the OCR website. The on-line filmed material has examples of appropriate tasks. Also centres may use the Controlled Assessment Consultancy to have “real-life” and any task validated.

Few centres linked Speaking and Listening to work for the Spoken Language study. With the crossover of the two units, centres may take the opportunity to economise on preparation and assessment time, by looking as to how to combine tasks.

Record keeping

A key part of the process is record keeping. Centres are advised to maintain on-going records for all candidates, perhaps making use of a centrally held data base of marks for candidates, with written comments. These procedures, good practice in many centres now, help to prevent problems arising from staff absences, changes of staff and the like. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used to form the basis for assessment. The OCR designed form covers all the necessary elements required by the external moderator.

Centres must remember that candidates’ record sheets form a vital piece of evidence in the moderation process. If there is a lack of detail in the descriptions of activities, or where

comments on performance have been “lifted” directly from the band descriptors with little or no linkage to individual candidate achievement, then it is extremely difficult to carry out the moderation of a centre and confirm a centre’s marks.

It is a centre’s responsibility to ensure that moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records, with all sections completed and marks/ arithmetic checked to eliminate mathematical or transcription errors.

Thankfully the majority of centres provided all the necessary information, with well-presented, often word processed records, and it was only a minority of centres that had to be reminded of their responsibilities.

The Application of the Criteria

The starting point for this must be achievement as set against the performance criteria, fixing first on the band and then secondly the mark within the band range. Comments on achievement on candidates’ assessment forms should make reference to the band descriptors and give a mark out of 40 for each separate context. The final mark is based on a mathematical calculation; the three separate marks totalled and divided by three. No assumptions should be made as to a link between bands/marks and grades.

Good practice in awarding marks balances strengths and weaknesses; not just rewarding strengths. An explanation is given for example as to why a candidate failed to achieve the next band when on the borderline. This aspect of the application of the criteria is particularly important where there is bunching of marks, to distinguish separate performances.

Internal Standardisation Procedures

Good practice is to use cross moderation of groups, joint marking exercises, reorganising of groups for assessment and department Inset training using the filmed evidence supplied by OCR.

The majority of centres had secure and often very rigorous procedures in place, but again worryingly a minority of centres had to be reminded of their responsibilities. Centres must have procedures in place to ensure that internal marking is standardised and that a reliable rank order of marks is sent to the external moderator. Importantly the internal standard is judged against the agreed OCR standard by the use of the filmed assessments from OCR and confirmed by visits to centres. Some centres, often with one teacher working in isolation, are failing to judge their own standards against those of OCR.

In addition to the standardisation of marking, it is the centre’s responsibility to present a standardised set of records for the moderation sample. Similarly task setting across the candidate entry has enabled all candidates to meet the specification requirements; this as highlighted previously applies particularly to the “real-life” context.

Administration

The administration of this unit could have been smoother. Centres must familiarise themselves with the deadlines and procedures pertinent to this unit.

Time was wasted and the moderation process protracted by chasing centres for samples and forms. Some centres are waiting for moderators to select the sample. For section A of this unit the sample is centre selected, and as such the sample candidate records, together with the moderator’s copy of the mark sheets, a signed Centre Authentication and a completed Internal Standardisation record should all be sent to the external moderator by the published deadline.

As centres increasingly have the non-specialist examinations officer as the point of contact and dispatcher of moderation material, it is vital for the smooth running of the process, that instructions regarding procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties.

Attention is drawn to the OCR website for instructions, a check list and copies of all relevant forms.

Centres should distinguish between the sampling procedures for Speaking and Listening and those for the Spoken Language study; the former is centre selected and the latter selected by OCR, though the one moderator now deals with both Speaking and Listening and the Spoken Language study.

However grateful acknowledgement is made to those who got it right and enabled moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

In conclusion it cannot be stressed enough that centres make use of all the support material readily available for this unit, mention of which has been made previously but to summarise:

- DVDs with commentaries and guidance; issued September 2010
- On-line filmed material with commentary and guidance; available from September 2012 onwards
- A specific guidance document for the “real-life” context requirement
- The Consultancy service for the Speaking and Listening unit
- Advisory visits to centres with specific centre feedback
- Reports to Centres on previous examination series; individual centre reports and the general Report to Centres

As regards help with the administration procedures, instructions, forms and records; paper versions are sent to centres, available on the OCR website, and described on the DVD/filmed material as a separate item.

Speaking and Listening has always been a real strength for candidates and this is testimony to the hard work and dedication of the teachers involved in preparing candidates. Many thanks for the continuing commitment in preparing and assessing the candidates.

A652B Spoken Language

General Comments

Once again, centres are to be commended for their diligence in teaching and administering this component. There were detailed and precise comments on the work and CAFs, identifying how the marking criteria had been applied and there was often clear evidence of internal standardisation. The majority of centres had applied the OCR standards accurately.

In some cases, centres submitted responses to the tasks set for the 2010-12 sessions, not those set for January and June 2013. **Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that the correct tasks are completed as tasks from different sessions may not be accepted.**

The contextualisation of tasks was in most cases effective and enabled candidates to meet the assessment objectives. Many candidates compared two or more texts as part of their study; centres should note that comparison is not a requirement of this component but in some cases the comparative aspect may enable candidates to analyse patterns of language across texts. In some cases, candidates found it difficult to make valid comparisons across very different text types, eg when looking at an interview and a speech and at times depth and detail of analysis was compromised by candidates having been asked to cover too many texts. Candidates were more enabled to respond in a focussed way when tasks were contextualised precisely, eg "How does Queen Elizabeth use language to convey both intimacy and status in her Christmas broadcast?"

Candidates generally showed a much more secure and precise understanding of the context and purposes of the texts under consideration in this session which enabled them to discuss how language is selected to meet those purposes in a much more coherent way. There were far fewer instances of candidates simply identifying a number of rhetorical devices and making a brief and superficial comment on each.

Martin Luther King

Many candidates responded to this task and it was pleasing that most went beyond a simple identification of rhetorical devices and were often able to make sensitive responses to the way in which imagery was chosen and how it reflected the purpose of the speech. One candidate wrote, "In his speech he refers to 'great trials and tribulations' and 'narrow jail cells' which both have a biblical nuance and speak of the suffering of Jesus. Through the biblical suffering, Dr King has elevated the negro suffering by likening it to that of Jesus". There were clear discussions of the effects of other language choices too, for example the sympathy elicited by the images of innocent children.

Queen Elizabeth

In this task, candidates' understanding of the purpose and context of the different speeches was key to a successful response, particularly when considering the Children's Hour broadcast and the tribute to Diana, Princess of Wales. In the case of the latter, candidates were often able to demonstrate how the Queen was responding to a complex situation on a personal and national level.

Candidates presented interesting discussions of how the Queen used language to present herself both as a monarch and mother in the Christmas broadcasts and how she sought to emphasise her understanding of her subjects' lives, for example, "The fact that she imagines her audience at home watching TV makes it feel very close, personal and intimate."

Rob Brydon

Candidates worked hard with complex texts in response to this task. Many considered the relationship of prepared and spontaneous speech in interviews and in stand-up, the way Brydon seeks to elicit sympathy and also how he laughs at himself.

Once again, a secure grasp of the context was vital to this task. In discussing his interviews of Fry and Walliams, the strongest responses recognised that he was subverting the celebrity interview in his refusal to defer to the interviewee. His creation of a persona is also important in the analysis of his stand-up; some candidates recognised that in places the audience were being invited to laugh with Brydon at his character.

The Apprentice

This was a very popular area of study and candidates clearly engaged well with the various texts used. It is a rich source of material for discussion and centres took a range of approaches, several considering the power dynamics evident in various exchanges.

Candidates considered in detail the nature of interactions in the Boardroom and how individuals sought to manipulate and direct the discussions in order to present themselves in a particular way to Lord Sugar and sometimes discussed the way Lord Sugar exerted his dominance. Candidates also considered the audition tapes and other 'to camera' pieces where candidates promoted themselves to either the production team or the TV audience; many made interesting comments on the relative fluency of the individuals and of the effect of their language choices on the viewer's impression of them.

The News

Although fewer centres addressed this task in the January session, it provided a range of areas for discussion. Candidates considered the way the same news item was presented for different audiences, discussing how language varies to make stories accessible or dramatic and how audiences are guided in their understanding of the importance of an issue.

A680 information and Ideas (Foundation Tier)

General Comments

The question paper proved to be accessible and of an appropriate level of demand for the tier. Candidates readily engaged with the reading material for Section A: 'freakish' weather becoming the norm in the UK (in Text A) and an article about the effects of Hurricane Irene in New York (in Text B). The two writing tasks were equally popular.

The majority of candidates had obviously been well prepared for the examination and schools are now familiar with the format of questions and booklet. The spaces provided for responses were sufficient for all but a few candidates, who used (very often unnecessarily) either the additional pages at the end of the booklet or separate pages attached to the booklet. Mostly these were used for continuation of Question 2(a) and/or for one of the two writing tasks. However, it should be noted that lengthy answers are not necessary to achieve a good grade; further comment will be made in the relevant sections of this report.

In most cases, candidates appeared to have followed the advice regarding time allocation; few responses showed evidence of running out of time.

Individual Questions

Section A – Reading

No examiners reported any instances of candidates using the incorrect text for Q1, but a few candidates used the first text to answer either Q2(a) or Q2(b).

Some candidates mistakenly commented on headings and photographs in their answer to Q2(b).

Question 1

1(a)-1(c) These easier questions provide a relatively gentle way in to the paper, though not all candidates scored all 6 marks. Some put the wrong date for Q1(b) and some did not manage to provide all three effects in Q1(c). There were relatively few instances of candidates trying to squeeze too much writing into the boxes provided. 1(d)

Stronger responses demonstrated a clear focus on the task and were able to show evidence of expressing points in their own words – 'as far as possible', as the question demands. These candidates showed a secure understanding of the text across a number of valid points.

Less successful responses were often marked by the presence of one or more of the following:

- points made that were not relevant to the task
- points made at excessive length
- points repeated.

Better answers addressed both elements of the question: what the passage reveals about extreme weather in Britain and people's views about the weather in Britain. In general, less successful answers tended to concentrate on the former.

Less effective responses simply altered occasional words or inverted the sentence structure in the hope that this would be construed as 'own words' – but such approaches tended to work mechanically through the passage, lifting material without achieving a clear focus on the actual task.

The weakest answers lifted material indiscriminately and showed an almost complete misunderstanding of the task. It should be noted that there is no reward for candidates expressing their own views, however keenly felt or competently expressed. Finally, there were candidates who misguidedly treated Q1(d) as if it were a Q2(b)-type task: eg 'he uses metaphors comparing the weather to different animals'.

Question 2

Most candidates took note of the relative weightings of Q2(a) and Q2(b) – 6 and 14 marks respectively. There was, however, a minority of candidates who wrote at excessive length for Q2(a).

2(a) Stronger responses commented on the effect of such features as the pun in the title 'The Big Puddle' and in the caption 'Rain Dance'. They commented, too, on the contrast between the photograph of revellers dancing in Times Square and that of the New York cab stranded in floodwater. Some candidates explored with some thoroughness the precise effects created by the use of the words 'defy', 'DELUGE' and 'stranded' as used in the captions. The words 'hits', 'flees' and 'chaos' in the sub-headings also received critical attention.

Less successful responses merely identified features without comment or made generic comments about headings, photographs and captions that could be true of any newspaper article, or indeed, of any media text. Once again, examiners were informed in very general terms that headings 'make you want to read on' and photographs 'draw you in', or vice versa. Some candidates wrote at excessive length about the symbolism of colours – black 'connoting death, red 'blood' and 'the yellow behind the girl stands for the sunshine that will come after the rain and the green below is for crops growing'. Such observations lack precision, and examiners reported that the word 'connotes' is often used incorrectly for 'means'.

As with Q2(b), the space provided for the answer provides guidance to candidates about a suitable length for their response. Selection of some relevant points together with pertinent analytical comment is sufficient to gain all 6 marks for this question. Candidates spending too much time writing on Q2(a) risk under-performing in Q2(b).

2(b) Successful responses contained clear evidence of the ability to choose and analyse relevant detail, commenting on both the information given and specific words and phrases which showed the power of the storm. They commented, often in detail, on the precise effect of words and phrases such as: 'got a big ducking', 'swept through', 'knocking out electricity', 'pounded', 'lashed', 'swamped', 'deluged', 'torrential' etc. It should be noted that the quality of analytical comment is a discriminator in this question.

However, many responses did not address aspects of language used in the article. Of these responses, the better ones did explore how the use of certain information points, such as the statistics used ('winds of 65mph', 'Up to 65 million people'), served to illustrate the power of the hurricane. The less effective responses simply listed information points, sometimes with much lifting of material from the passage. In these responses, candidates described and paraphrased rather than analysed.

Candidates would benefit from regular practice at answering Q2(b)-style questions, using both information **and** language points to address the question. They should be mindful that the best responses to language combine short quotation and concise analytical comment.

Section B – Writing

Questions 3 and 4

Examiners saw the full range of performance.

It was pleasing to see the time and effort taken by some candidates in their planning, increasingly in the form of mind maps, though occasionally a less useful generic acronym such as 'AFOREST' constituted planning.

Once again, it is worth pointing out that length of answer alone rarely secures high reward. There simply is no need for candidates to write more than one-and-a-half to two sides of writing (using average size of handwriting as a guide). Some candidates perhaps feel the need to write until the very end of the examination – but they would be better advised to spend five minutes or so checking their work for basic errors. There should be no need to use additional pages.

Stronger responses showed a clear control of the material, and offered an engaging opening, clear development of ideas and an effective ending. Careful consideration was given to choices of vocabulary and sentence structures, and the readers' need for clarity and accuracy was acknowledged.

By contrast, less successful responses did not convey much evidence of crafting material for a reader. There was a lack of control of material and, at best, only straightforward development of ideas; sometimes responses had a perfunctory conclusion (eg 'So that was my memorable day') or ended in mid-air. In general, the greater the length of responses, the more rambling and repetitive they tended to become. The least successful responses contained a level of linguistic error that required examiners to re-read the material to try to make sense of it. Common problems with punctuation included confusion between upper and lower case letters, and a failure to mark sentence divisions.

Question 3

This asked candidates to write about a day which had been made memorable for them because of the weather. Successful responses wrote in an engaging magazine style, offering vivid descriptions of the weather and how it had played 'such an important part' in their 'memorable' day. There were, however, some responses that neglected to mention the weather or alluded to it only very fleetingly; often there was little sense of the style of a magazine article. Candidates tended to write about weddings, sporting events and special trips where the weather dominated proceedings – usually to beneficial effect. Other candidates wrote at least equally well about weather creating some kind of disaster. A minority of weaker responses relied too heavily on the content on 'The Big Puddle' article and insufficiently on candidates' own experiences.

Question 4

This asked candidates to respond to the deliberately provocative prompt: 'Nowadays all that teenagers do is follow the crowd'. Quite a few candidates took umbrage at what they saw as the impertinence of the view expressed and consequently offered an engaging counter-view of the independence of young people, and of the importance of 'being yourself'. Many thought the view expressed in the prompt all too true and bemoaned the sheep-like behavior of young people, dependent on others for ready-made fashions, haircuts, tastes and attitudes. There was much reflection on the influence of 'peer pressure' and following the wrong 'role models', usually media icons. Candidates were of course free to take whatever line they wished, and there were some pleasingly cogent arguments involving personal anecdote and general observations of the lives of teenagers. This question produced some lively and engaging writing much appreciated by examiners.

A680 information and Ideas (Higher Tier)

General Comments

The texts and the questions were readily understood by candidates who offered a range of interesting responses and generally kept good focus on their tasks, resisting the temptation to discuss more general environmental issues. Most candidates completed the paper and rubric error, such as use of Text A for Q3 was rare. Very brief responses were also rare.

It was very encouraging to note fewer instances of candidates having been entered for the wrong tier and, if candidates have performed less well than expected, centres are advised to look at the marks for individual questions and note any specific areas of weakness. Examiners were pleased to note that understanding of how to approach this paper is increasingly secure; however, there are still some misconceptions about what is required to answer Q1 and Q2.

Many candidates had chosen to start with the Writing response, which did enable them to complete their chosen task with a satisfactory ending. If this approach is taken, candidates are advised to allow sufficient time for reading Text B and developing their response to Q3. This was sometimes a weakness in scripts that opened with the Section B questions.

Question 1

As in previous sessions, excessive length was a feature of most of the less successful responses. Most candidates understood that they were being asked to deliver 'information' and there were relatively few examples of candidates drifting into the Q2 style commentary on technique. Unfortunately, information was not delivered in a concise manner. Q1 carries fewer marks than Q2/3, yet we saw many instances of Q1 answers that were longer than either. Repetition and excessive detail were the main areas of weakness. Frequently, candidates opened with a concise sentence; identifying precisely the three stages of recycling and then went on to write, "The first stage is..." starting what was, in many cases, three paragraphs of needless elaboration.

Candidates are directed to use their own words 'as far as possible' here. This must be carefully balanced so that use of own words does not distort or blur the point being delivered. Candidates do not need to spend time trying to find replacement words for 'landfill' and 'pollution', often writing lengthy definitions in the process. Examiners do acknowledge that inevitably some of the words from the text will be used, but what candidates must avoid is quotation and mere 'lifting' of lines from the text, as this does not show understanding.

Question 2

The question directed candidates to consider **how** features of presentation and use of language convey information about the importance of recycling. The best answers looked at the article as a whole and considered the three part structure whereby the first section explained the process of recycling and the two subsequent sections explored the importance of recycling, first in global terms and then in more personal, small scale 'at home' terms.

Comment on how the images support the text considered how the bins look bright and 'user-friendly' and so support the idea that recycling is easy, and confirm the information that a wide variety of materials can be recycled. The duplication of the three arrow recycling logo, first seen on the bins and later seen within a globe topped with green shoots, gave visual support to the ideas in the text covered under 'Recycling Saves the Earth'.

There was plenty of comment on the writer's choice of language and particularly the way he creates a sense of shared responsibility ('we can help' and 'we are able to'). Candidates picked up on the hints that people who recycle are somehow superior in that they are 'getting creative' and 'being kind', while being smart enough to do 'a little research'. This was contrasted with the groups who create 'problems' that caring individuals must 'combat'.

Weaker responses tended to confine attention to the pictures and the headings and comment here was often exclusively descriptive with excessive attention to the colours used. Prepared comment on what associations might accompany particular colours is most unhelpful and candidates trying to assert that the red bin somehow signified 'danger' (or promoted feelings of love?) were not answering the question. Frequently, candidates did little more with the headings than to comment on the larger font and use of 'bold', thereby missing the opportunity to see what these headings and key words indicated about the structure of the piece. Answers that simply describe what the article looks like cannot be placed any higher than low Band 5.

As in past sessions, some answers offered little more than a list of devices 'usually' found in media texts accompanied by a definition. Simply identifying use of personal pronouns 'to involve the reader' earns no credit unless the candidate can explain what the reader is being involved in and why it is important to the success of the article. Comment that could be made about *any* media text is not showing 'understanding' – which is the first bullet point of all bands in the mark scheme. The examiner is unable to give credit to prepared generic comment. Not all questions are rhetorical questions, but those who correctly identified, 'How would you like a landfill in your back yard?' as use of this device often made a good attempt to analyse here.

Question 3

This question directed attention to use of language and the tone created. Discussion of tone was often a strength with many candidates exploring various shifts in tone. Most candidates explored the writer's anger at the nuisance and 'blight' of the 'monstrous' wheelie bin and the general sense of frustration and exasperation directed at the councils who 'steamroller' through unwanted changes and 'saddle' homeowners with a problem, while ignoring their protests. Best answers also picked up on those moments of calm reason where support for recycling was offered and sensible alternatives to bins put forward. The writer's manipulation of emotion by reference to diminutive elderly people was frequently a well-made point as was the comparison with the 'leafy London borough' where residents 'are free' and can 'enjoy' their front gardens.

The most limited answers simply asserted, without support from text, 'The tone is...' and there followed either, 'negative' or 'formal'. Neither of these words is sufficiently precise to show understanding. As with Q2, weaker answers were characterised by unsupported generic comment, often replicating the same form of words used in Q2. Candidates seeking to make the point that the writer uses facts and figures to support his case sometimes revealed their lack of understanding if the fact selected was taken from the opposing argument, as in 'less dangerous for refuse collectors'.

Successful responses will always avoid empty formulaic comments about the extract being 'relatable' and 'drawing you in' and will instead offer precise direct reference to text. Device spotting has only very limited use here. Not all phrases that contain the number three (we've got three each) are an example of the 'power of three'.

Question 4

This was the more popular choice and candidates of all abilities had good ideas in abundance. My own personal favourite suggested that the community should put all its efforts into building the world's largest roller coaster. The most popular choices were inevitably youth centres and community centres, but with some very imaginative ideas for the activities that might go on in them. Examiners were pleased to note that libraries and homework rooms featured.

Many candidates from rural areas simply wanted a shop and many city children wanted some green open space, not only for a kick-about but to garden and grow vegetables. Material from the given texts again proved a helpful stimulus, with candidates suggesting land for a recycling centre and often taking care to assure the reader that their building would be environmentally friendly. Use of ideas and information from the reading booklet is entirely acceptable although candidates should be cautioned that they must not simply repeat sections of text.

Examiners were flexible in their marking of scripts which seemed to misunderstand what authority the Editor of the local newspaper might have. Candidates sometimes wrote as if the Editor would be granting planning permission or even funding their project and this did cause some distortion of the tone and purpose of the letters.

The very best letters judged their audience very shrewdly with a variety of persuasive strategies to present their views in the best possible light. Good answers were also characterised by thoughtful comment on what the needs of the community might be and again this session examiners were impressed by the thoughtfulness and maturity shown by the candidates.

Good responses were well-organised and showed evidence of careful planning. Several examiners reported that intelligent paragraphing was a clear strength in responses to this question. Length of response was also well judged with candidates achieving a good balance between sufficient development of their ideas and avoidance of excessive factual detail.

Question 5

This was less frequently attempted but often produced very high quality responses, with candidates both delivering passionately held opinions and offering lively, often dramatic, accounts of their form of protest. The modern response to great social evil, 'We set up a Facebook page' at first seemed a little tame compared to manning the barricades but examiners did learn the effectiveness of this form of protest and were impressed.

Candidates wrote eloquently on their attempts to protest against university tuition fees, withdrawal of EMA, and animal welfare issues. A frequent theme was dismay if a peaceful protest was spoilt by reckless behaviour. A now regular feature of this paper is that examiners see repeats of topics from past sessions and many candidates protested against school uniform, which they found to be 'itchy' and 'dreary'.

Protests in the home situation also featured, with most popular choices being the right to become a vegetarian and the right to body piercings. We felt sympathy for the candidate who ended his response by getting a tattoo he 'didn't really want', because he had made so much fuss about his right to have one.

A particular strength was the thought that had gone into creating an effective opening and an appropriate ending. Introductions frequently announced the trigger factor for the protest in a very dramatic, or sometimes enigmatic, fashion. Responses then progressed clearly through the form of protest to a satisfying ending that either produced a result and/or led the candidate to reflect on their involvement with their chosen cause or to reflect on what they had gained from the experience.

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