

**English Language**

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J355**

**Examiners' Reports**

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**June 2011**

**J355/R/11**

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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

Not only had a significant number of Centres entered this series, but also the vast majority of candidates had been well prepared for the Controlled Conditions Assessments. Most Centres had taken great pains over the paperwork and especially the forecast grades. The adaptation to a new form of internal moderation and transition from the previous coursework system had been achieved seamlessly. This gave considerable credibility to the judgments made by those responsible for this.

The cover sheets, annotation and summative comments were mainly very clear, concise and helpful in showing why marks had been awarded. The best were concise, consistent (with something on each page of the work) and couched in the language of (or a close paraphrase of) what is stated in the relevant band descriptors. In a very few cases, some pages had no annotation at all, which may have led to an overall lack of coherence in the assessment. We do stress that the marking and assessment must be done once, of the whole, completed piece of work. The work should always be annotated exclusively for its audiences: the internal and external moderators in the first instance.

Even where marks given were outside tolerance, the rank order of the candidates was mostly correct.

Centres should remember that although the word limits are recommendations only they should still be taken as a guide to the sort of length students should expect to write at. There is absolutely no premium at all on length for its own sake: on the contrary, excessive length often invites repetition and much tedium and is self-penalizing. This is sometimes confirmed by very long responses, which appear to have page after page with very little if any annotation from the teacher. Many more pithy pieces – concise, much revised and edited, in less than the suggested word counts – scored higher than long drawn out, repetitive sagas, personal narratives or recapitulation of plotting. In the Extended Literary Text Study candidates *must* make the assumption that moderators have read and are familiar with the texts of choice.

This is of course NOT “coursework” in its previously accepted and understood sense. This work may well not be as polished or sophisticated in appearance as that was and, to repeat, certainly not as long. The scope and scale, however, can be just as big, or, indeed, bigger and opportunities for spontaneity, inspiration and risk taking remain.

### Extended Literary Text

The vast majority of responses were on prose texts, almost all on “Of Mice and Men”. “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “Tsotsi” were also represented. We await submissions on other texts in 2012.

The set task on Steinbeck, about disadvantaged characters, remains very popular with candidates, although a few chose the themed task on choices and decisions. Many of the best essays eschewed the popular format of writing about five or more of the characters in perceived order of disadvantage and delivered a comparison of two of them (most often Curley’s Wife and Crooks), with further comparative references to some of the others – often, pleasingly, Curley himself. The ways in which the task was approached reflected what is at the heart of the preparation for this Assessment: collaboration and discussion leading to a clear insight into the passages, characters and issues each candidate feels most comfortable writing about. The multiplicity of approaches within Centres and classes is to be encouraged.

The themed task of choice on "To Kill a Mockingbird" was, again, "Choices and Decisions" which fitted the bill very well in almost all cases. Weaker essays sometimes struggled to see the big picture in this work and tended, on occasion, to get a little sidetracked by incidental detail. The facts are that a momentous series of choices and decisions lead to the portrayal of racism in all its ghastly nastiness, ignorance and rank prejudice. The best work said how and why this was, with great force, conviction and clarity.

The few candidates writing about "Tsotsi" went with the set task of sickness within the society Fugard presents and did so with both literal and metaphorical interpretations, with much supporting detail and personal engagement.

We also saw work on "Romeo and Juliet" "Macbeth" and the poetry of Wilfred Owen and Simon Armitage. On "Macbeth" the choices and decisions task was popular and effectively developed.

We would stress the following points about the mark scheme and how candidates can improve their performance in this section of the Unit.

- The second bullet point in Bands 1 and 2 is worth pondering and planning carefully. It invites the candidate to link the detail of the text to the ways it has been responded to: very much the reader's reactions. There are almost always more ways than one of responding to a text and so long as what is said is given detailed analytical support it will be credited. For example:

*On the one hand it has been/could be argued that George is handicapped by having to look after Lennie the whole time: one of the first things he says is 'I could get along so easy and so nice if I didn't have you on my tail. I could live so easy and maybe have a girl' and makes repeated similar references. However, my response to the end of the story was that George cared for Lennie above everything. At the moment of crisis he tells him: 'No' said George. 'I ain't mad. I never been mad, and I ain't now. That's a thing I want you to know.' This and the constant reference back to their dream of 'livin' of the fatta the lan' confirms my view.*

- And similarly the second bullet: analyse/identify/discuss the **writer's** perspective. What is wanted here is NOT an account of the social/cultural/historical background and context or a potted biography (or, worse, alleged but unsubstantiated biographical details). The writer's perspective is the angle at which the writer stands to his work. It is arguable, for example that the perspective Shakespeare takes on marriage and courtship in the C16th is one of questioning and challenge, given his portrayal of Juliet and the way she speaks to both Romeo and her father. Steinbeck's perspective is one of intense sympathy with the lonely, disenfranchised and dispossessed. It **isn't** his view of the dustbowl disaster or the "American Dream". Some of this is relevant to and is assessed in English Literature A663, Prose from Other Cultures. It is worth pointing out that although Centres may well be using the same text to prepare candidates for these Assessments, the nature of the assessments is very different. 1600 words or more, a long lead in and preparation time, plenty of collaboration and discussion, task and notes in A651: as opposed to 45 minutes in exam conditions in A663 with essentially different assessment objectives to fulfill.

To repeat what we say above, candidates must persist with the assumption that they do not need to give any repetition of the plot/narrative/story: they should get straight on to doing what the assessment objectives require.

When the work is submitted it is sometimes helpful to the external moderators to have a sight of the notes that the candidates used. The inclusion of these cannot possibly serve to harm the outcomes: but may be helpful in establishing issues about the context and development of the work. Please do not submit more than this.

We hope that as the specification develops, teachers will take an increasingly 'hands off' approach in order to stimulate students' independent reading and preparation and location of those elements of Literary Texts which most inspire them.

### **Personal and Imaginative Writing**

Responses covered both choices of core tasks and all the satellite tasks. Some candidates got rather over concerned about the genre they were being asked to write in: the tasks are there to prompt and liberate the candidates, rather than confine them.

The best work was often pithy, concise and very well planned. It often had a humorous or macabre twist somewhere in the story and usually (but not necessarily) the core and satellite tasks cleverly complemented each other. There was less work than in January that strained the moderators' imaginations: naivety and inconsistency were less frequent.

Centres should discourage candidates from writing at excessive length and on topics only very loosely related to the tasks, which provide massive breadth of opportunity anyway. The time limits for all the work should be adhered to, otherwise work can fall into repetition with, eventually, breakdown of grammatical and syntactical control. This applies to all candidates but fairly obviously it applies especially to those with a weaker grasp of mechanical accuracy in the first place.

As with all writing of this sort, the establishment of:

- (a) a clear structure with an opening, development and closure; and
- (b) a consistently realised narrative voice

are of the essence in satisfying the assessment objectives.

Some tasks will have a clearly stated audience; others will have the successive moderators as the audience. If candidates wish to interpose an additional audience between themselves and the latter, that is perfectly acceptable.

As with all Controlled Assessment work, rigorous planning and preparation are essential in order to maximize candidates' chances of success.

# A652 Speaking and Listening and Spoken Language

## Section A – Speaking and Listening

### General Comments

With centres still delivering the legacy specification to their Year 11 groups, and many centres choosing not to enter Year 10 candidates at this stage, the entry was, as expected, very small. With changes to the terminal rule, centres may use any of the Controlled Assessment units for final assessment, so centres are deferring their entry for this unit until later in the course. However those centres that did enter candidates early will profit from centre specific feedback to confirm or modify their practice.

### Task setting

The requirement to cover the three different contexts is familiar from the legacy specification, so centres are experienced in setting appropriate activities to meet this aspect of Speaking and Listening task setting. However there is the new requirement of the “real-life context in and beyond the classroom”. 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 and 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 had embraced this new requirement with imaginative and enabling tasks, some centres need to review their task setting.

The “real-life context” requires more than just subject matter which extends beyond the classroom; rather it is a matter of purpose and audience: context. So, successful tasks often linked this context to the drama-focussed context or role play of some form: mock interviews, reality shows, and representatives of charities or pressure groups. Some centres were able to give their candidates an actual “real-life context”: presentations to parents and governors, or Heads of Year. These were often, but not exclusively, centres with a small entry. Tasks which were not valid, included: general discussions on attitudes to war; the advantages and disadvantages of various social and moral issues; or a “talk to the class” with the candidates participating as themselves.

For further support and guidance to fulfil the demands of the “real-life context”, attention is drawn to the ‘Real-Life Context Guide’ document on the OCR website, to activities on the Training and Guidance DVD issued to centres in the autumn term 2010 and on the next DVD due in September 2011, as well as to the Controlled Assessment Consultancy. Through the consultancy, a centre’s tasks may be validated.

Similarly problematic, for some centres, was the drama-focussed context. Centres need to link tasks to the assessment criteria for this context. There is no requirement for the stimulus material to be drama based or even literary based; indeed, more scope may be granted if candidates are freed from such, and are given the opportunity to create independent roles separated from drama texts. Simply performing a scene verbatim from a play (usually a Shakespeare play), without any adaptation, does not allow candidates the opportunity to meet the marking criteria.

One centre linked Speaking and Listening activities with work for A652 Section B: Spoken Language, through an activity based on cookery presenters, which covered the “real-life context” and the drama-focussed context.

With the crossover of the two units A643 and A652 Section A, centres may take this opportunity to review completely the bank of tasks used.

### **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 database of marks for candidates, with written comments. Such good practice in centres can help to prevent problems arising from staff absences, changes of staff etc. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used to form the basis for assessment. The OCR designed form (form GCW316, available on the website) 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 description of activities, or when 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.

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.

Many centres provided all the necessary information, with well-presented records, often word processed. However, a minority of centres 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 on 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. Centres are advised to check the final calculation carefully, as mistakes were discovered by moderators. Importantly, no assumptions should be made as to a link between bands/marks and grades.

Good practice in awarding marks balances strengths and weaknesses and does not just reward strengths. An explanation is given, for example, as to why a candidate failed to achieve the next band, when on borderlines. 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, reorganisation of groups for assessment and department Inset training using filmed evidence, provided by OCR.

The majority of centres had secure and often 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 moderator – please see form GCW330 on the website. Importantly, the internally set standard is judged against the agreed OCR Standard, by the use of filmed assessments from OCR. Internal standards are confirmed by visits to centres. Some centres are failing to judge their own standards against those on the OCR DVD.

### **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 the need to chase centres for samples and forms. Some centres are waiting for moderators to select the sample. For this unit the sample is centre-selected. Centres must submit **all** paperwork (candidates' records, together with the moderator's copy of the mark sheets, a signed Centre Authentication form and a completed Internal Standardisation record) to the moderator **at the same time** as they submit the whole cohort's marks for Speaking and Listening. Detailed instructions for submission of marks and paperwork are contained in the Admin Guide and can also be found in the *Speaking and Listening Instructions* document (CWI769) stored under 'Forms' here on the website:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse\\_2010/english/english\\_lang/documents/index.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse_2010/english/english_lang/documents/index.html)

Standard deadlines are 10<sup>th</sup> January for the January session and 15<sup>th</sup> May for the June session.

As centres increasingly move to systems where non-subject-specialist examination officers are the point of reference and dispatchers 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.

Again, attention is drawn to the OCR website for instructions, a checklist of what to send and copies of all relevant forms; this is in addition to the paper versions sent to centres.

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

## **Conclusion**

Finally, as centres become more familiar with task setting to meet the new requirements and confident in applying the new performance criteria, this unit should develop successfully, with opportunities for candidates to achieve.

Attention is strongly drawn to OCR's Training and Guidance DVD for this unit. The 2011 – 2012 DVD is due to be issued to centres in late September 2011. These DVDs are to be produced annually and will continue to provide vital support for all centres, in assessment and task setting.

## **Section B – Spoken Language**

### **General Comments**

This was the first entry for this component and centres had paid careful attention to the specification and guidance available. Candidates were well prepared for the controlled assessment and the rubric was adhered to in all cases. In assessing candidates' work, teachers had paid careful attention to the marking criteria and written detailed comments which demonstrated how they had been applied. Centres are to be congratulated for their diligence in this.

The strongest responses maintained a sensitive analysis of language; where context and paralinguistic features were mentioned, this supported the analysis of language use. Entries for this session focussed on the tasks for Barack Obama, Eddie Izzard and the presentation of food and cookery on television. We expect a broader range of tasks to be submitted in the 2012 sessions when entries will be substantially larger.

### **Spoken Language of a Public Figure: Barack Obama**

Centres approached this task well, ensuring that candidates had a clear focus for their study. All candidates were able to identify the features of rhetoric employed as well as some influential paralinguistic features. The strongest responses analysed the impact of linguistic patterns in the

speeches eg the use of historical reference to present the occasion as momentous and the inclusive use of personal pronouns. They also considered the way the speeches had been structured to guide the audience's response and how pace and pause created an aura of confidence and gravity. Some candidates chose to compare one or more speeches to the Letterman interview; comparison is not a requirement of this component but a number of candidates used the contrast to illuminate the points they were making.

### **Spoken Language of a Public Figure: Eddie Izzard**

This was a challenging task and centres had supported candidates well by identifying a focus or short text for the study. The strongest responses focused on the way Izzard uses language to create humour, particularly changes in register, and the contrast of the monumental with the mundane as well as surprising combinations of images.

### **The Presentation of Food and Cookery on Television**

Most candidates chose to take a comparative approach to this task. While this is not a requirement of the specification, candidates contrasted the styles of Fanny Cradock, Jamie Oliver and sometimes Delia Smith to illustrate how different language use contributes to the relationship with the viewer. The strongest responses focussed on patterns of language, eg the register and use of imperatives; good use was made of reference to paralinguistic and contextual features where it was shown to support the analysis of language.

# 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 clearly engaged with the reading material, on volcanoes, for Section A. The two optional Writing questions were found to be equally popular choices.

Candidates had on the whole been clearly prepared for the format of the question and answer booklet used at Foundation Tier. They should be reminded that the spaces provided for answers reflect the relative weightings of questions. Three pages are provided for the Writing answer, but it is not expected that candidates fill all three pages with their responses. It was in fact encouraging to see many candidates devote space (and time) to planning their response.

If candidates feel the need to write more than the space in the booklet provides, they should do so on additional sheets of examination paper (appropriately headed and attached to the booklet by means of a treasury tag). They should not write outside the spaces provided in the actual booklet.

The A680 Information and Ideas paper is similar in content to the legacy 2431 Non-fiction, Media and Information paper. A significant difference is the increased weighting for Writing, up from a third to half of the paper. It was clear that the majority of candidates took due note of this weighting.

## Individual Questions

### Section A – Non-Fiction and Media

#### Question 1

1(a) – 1(c). Question 1 begins with a number of questions requiring short responses. This session there were three questions, each requiring two short answers. The space for answers is deliberately restricted, to signal to candidates a relative brevity in their answers. Selective copying is acceptable for these questions, though verbatim copying of excessive chunks of text is not. Candidates need to read the question carefully, as clear directions are given about the specific parts of the text from which the answers will come. Some incorrect answers were the result of not reading the question with sufficient care.

1(d). Examiners saw a range of answers to this question. Many candidates were able to identify a number of relevant points from the extract. Successful responses focused throughout on the 'effects' of the massive eruption and made laudable attempts to use their own words where they could. Less successful responses tended to lift material from the extract without focusing clearly on the 'effects' mentioned in the question. Such responses contained much that candidates had learned about the massive eruption generally rather than its effects.

It is worthwhile in the early days of this specification to repeat the guidance offered in the January 2011 report: *'As is customary with this type of question, it was possible for clearly focused responses to Q1(d) to gain higher marks with fewer points than responses which had more points but which, to varying degrees, were more reliant on the original wording of the text. The strategy of altering the occasional word will not lead to high reward; although this appears to*

offer a little more than slavish copying, it is an approach that still relies heavily on lifting from the original text.'

There were some instances of candidates (who clearly understood the extract) adopting an analytical approach more suitable for, and tested in, Question 2b. Candidates are not invited in this question to quote and comment on the use of language.

## Question 2

This question covers similar territory to the Media question in the legacy 2431 paper. The principal difference is that two part-questions are provided in the new A680 paper. The first deals with aspects of presentation – here, headings and pictures; the second with the effects of information and language used. This split has clearly been to the advantage of candidates, helping them to manage their time more effectively.

2(a). Candidates should be reminded of the need to identify *specific* features and then to go on to comment on the *particular* effects they create for a reader. A less successful approach in evidence was to produce generalised comment that could be true of most media texts: eg 'headings are in bold and make us want to read on', 'the colour pictures capture the attention of the reader'. Some answers simply repeated features rather than analysed their effects; eg 'paralysed means the planes are paralysed and this word makes you interested'. Q2(a) is weighted at 6 out of 20 marks, and space is provided accordingly.

Q2(b). This question is weighted at 14 out of 20 marks. More space is provided for answers to Question 2(b), though candidates should try to be selective rather than exhaustive. Stronger responses included evidence of the ability to analyse, commenting specifically on the ways in which information and words and phrases conveyed the power of the volcanic eruption and its effects. For example, one candidate wrote that the word 'chaos' suggested 'a lot of people running round like headless chickens, unable to do anything about the power of the ash cloud'. Thoughtful, personal comment on the effects of a few carefully-selected words and phrases is a better strategy than a mechanical listing of words or devices without commenting on specific effects. A number of candidates spent time merely spotting examples of alliteration, the rule of three or adjectives (sometimes incorrectly). Others listed words from the text and offered little more than a generalised comment such as 'these are negative words'.

Generalised points about the writing's ability to draw the reader in or make the reader feel as if she were there cannot lead to high reward. Examiners felt that candidates would benefit from the frequent opportunities to practise this type of analytical question.

## Section B – Writing

### Questions 3 and 4

Most candidates engaged successfully with their chosen task, which were of roughly equal popularity. There was little evidence of rushed final answers. All candidates should be encouraged to adopt the effective planning strategies evident in many of the more successful responses. In these, candidates had taken time to produce a plan, usually in the form of a bulleted list or mind map. It was noticeable that these candidates went on to produce writing which was on the whole clearly and engagingly expressed and also carefully-structured. There was often a purposeful introduction and interesting development leading to a satisfying conclusion. Those who did not plan tended to produce writing that was rambling and repetitive, with little focus on the actual question. It was not surprising that those who wrote at excessive length often made the greatest number of spelling and punctuation errors. Among the latter were the inability to mark the ends of sentences and also the random use of capital letters. The pronoun 'I' was very often written in lower case, and there were some instances of 'ur' (instead of 'your'). Numerals were routinely used in expressions such as 'in 5 mins' or '8 GCSEs'.

Candidates should not feel they have to use all the space available for their response just because it is there. They should use some time towards the end of the examination to proof-read their answers, and make necessary amendments.

Responses to Question 3 included many tales of trips to the airport, holidays and party arrangements going awry. Most answers included an explanation of feelings, and the opportunity to write about something going wrong led to lively accounts often with a sense of genuine tension leading up to the disaster.

For Question 4, successful responses were interesting and often heart-felt. In general, the format of 'a speech to your class' was attempted with at least some success, with responses demonstrating an awareness of audience and appropriate register. Some examiners commented on valiant attempts to use linguistic devices that didn't quite come off: eg 'It makes me so angry, annoyed and aggravated'.

## Higher Tier

### General Comments

Examiners reported that many candidates showed a clear understanding of the reading passages and engaged thoughtfully with the questions, their responses demonstrating a secure understanding of their content and an appreciation of the writers' techniques and purposes. Many answers to both tasks in Section B were well-structured, focused and a pleasure to read – many Examiners felt that a large number of candidates performed better in the writing task. In general, responses to this paper covered the complete range of achievement, although there were fewer responses at the very highest level than is usually the case with an examination at this level, possibly due to this being a predominantly Year 10 entry. Centres may wish to take this into consideration when they are deciding on their entry policy for future cohorts. Similarly, there was some indication that a higher percentage of candidates than has been the case in previous specifications were inappropriately entered for the Higher Tier paper. Entry for the Foundation Tier externally-examined unit will not preclude the award of an overall grade B for English or English Language, and some borderline C/D candidates may be better served by taking this route than by struggling with the requirements of the Higher Tier paper.

Examiners commented that the paper was appropriate in terms of length, readability, vocabulary and tasks set and that the candidates found the subject matter engaging. Overall, most candidates found the tasks accessible and there was little evidence that they were unable to answer all questions adequately within the time allowed. There was some indication that time was not always effectively organised between the two Sections of the paper. This was apparent in two main (and contrasting) ways. A minority of candidates wrote very little in response to the three reading tasks in Section A and then at great length for the writing task in Section B. This approach, inevitably, proved counter-productive as their responses to Section A were frequently limited in relevant points and, at times, wrongly focused; on the other hand, the attempts at the writing tasks were often unplanned and loosely structured and, the longer they went on, the more inaccurate the linguistic expression became. Another minority of candidates adopted the opposite approach and wrote answers of considerable length to Section A, which in many cases consisted of little more than paraphrase and description of the contents and appearance of the passages in the Reading Booklet Insert, and then produced very brief and undeveloped writing responses. It should be emphasised that although the total marks allocated to each section are equal, there are three discrete reading tasks that require a substantial amount of reading of unseen printed material, whereas candidates are required to attempt only one writing task for which a total of about 350-450 words is adequate. Teachers are, therefore, advised to encourage their candidates to apportion their time accordingly when sitting this paper.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Section A Reading

##### Question 1

*Read the article 'Wing and a Prayer' by Piers Townley.*

*Referring carefully to the article **outline concisely** what makes the experience of flying in a Pitts Special so exciting.*

**Use your own words** as far as possible.

In general, responses to this task were relevant and contained a range of appropriate points. However, only a small minority of candidates showed a sufficient overview and identified a sufficiently wide range of points to achieve marks in the Band 3 range and above. Examiners felt that most candidates had a secure understanding of the passage, but that their understanding of

the requirements of the task was less secure. Responses tended to fall, broadly, into three categories. The most successful focused clearly on the key requirement of the task, which was to state the details contained in the passage that communicated the excitement of flying in a *Pitts Special*. Responses at this level selected a range of points, such as: the speed at which the plane flies very low; the extreme manoeuvrability of the plane; the experience of increasing G forces; the stunts that can be performed and the experience of performing the loop; and expressed these concisely (but not so briefly as to blur the details of the points) in a way that was clearly focused on the requirements of the question.

Less successful responses fell into two main categories: some were simply far too short, consisting of no more than two or three lines and containing only a couple of relevant points which were so baldly stated that there was no indication of an overview of the topic; other responses were too long and frequently off-task because either they attempted an impressionistic, creative piece in the first person, imitative of the writer's experience; or they approached the task as if it were Q2, writing a quasi-analysis; or they digressed into their own (imported) views of what made the experience so exciting; or they virtually paraphrased the whole extract.

Centres are advised to emphasise to their candidates that this task tests summary-writing skills. Careful reading of both the passage and the wording of the question, and note making of appropriate points taken from the passage, are therefore essential stages in writing a successful response. Of all the questions in this paper, this is the one that requires the most detailed planning from candidates before they start to write their final answer.

## Question 2

*Piers Townley says, 'being airborne doesn't get much better than this.' How does the presentation of the article and the writer's use of language help to convey this impression to the reader?*

Most candidates wrote at adequate length in response to this question and some showed a clear appreciation of how both the presentation of the article and the language used by Piers Townley conveyed his sense of exhilaration to the readers. There were a good number of thoughtful attempts to deal with the ways in which the photographs associated with the article helped to convey the sense of excitement and these were supported by some thoughtful analytical attempts (as well as some more fanciful ones, usually related to the blue background of the main picture to which was imputed a range of connotations such as calmness, excitement, fear or a sense of cold). A large number of responses only made valid comments in relation to the pictures, with no references to the writer's language which was a central requirement of the task. It was, therefore, not possible to reward these attempts with marks higher than in the Band 4 range. When reference was made to the language it was frequently in the form of device spotting, with candidates earnestly hunting down examples of the 'rule of three', rhetorical questions etc. The least successful responses consisted of nothing but a list of the terms that might have been used by a writer but without quoting any examples of their use in the passage; middle range responses frequently quoted from the passage but did little more than follow them with assertions such as 'this draws the reader in/makes the reader want to read on' without either attempting to explain how or why this effect was achieved or how the chosen quotation conveyed the excitement of flying the *Pitts Special* to the reader. The most successful responses both quoted appropriately from the passage and explained how the selected quotation illustrated the writer's sense of excitement.

Centres are advised to encourage their candidates to ensure that their answers to this (and to Task 3) are closely focused on the terms of the question and that any references made are explained in these terms. It was clear that candidates had been thoroughly coached regarding attempted analysis, as evidenced by the numerous references to (eg): graphology; text to picture ratio (estimates varied enormously); 'a rise in cadence'; 'a decrease in cadence';

metaphors/similes; 'hard facts'/'soft facts'; font sizes; paragraphs; sub-headings; colours (eg red for danger, white for calmness); strong adjectives (which were sometimes adverbs) and lists (which somehow made things more exciting). Unfortunately, a very large number of candidates did not attempt to check whether these details were, in fact, relevant to the particular question that was set. Responses to this task can be significantly improved and developed by candidates asking themselves the simple questions 'Why?' or 'How?' after every statement they make and then answering these questions as the next stage of their analysis. It should also be borne in mind that while comments on the effectiveness of photographs in furthering a writer's intention are perfectly valid, technical details about the appearance of these photographs is not relevant to this paper.

A few candidates treated Question 1 and Question 2 as if they were the same task – indeed, as if they were part 1 and part 2 of the same task. Centres are advised to ensure that their candidates are fully aware that these are, in fact, discrete tasks.

### **Question 3**

*Read the passage 'Why we no longer enjoy flying' by Nigel Tisdall.*

*How does Nigel Tisdall convey to the reader his views on the experience of flying?*

*In your answer, refer to the language he uses and the way he presents his ideas.*

With the exception of the comments relating to the pictures, much of what was said about Task 2 above has equal relevance to candidates' responses to this question.

Those candidates who appreciated that Tisdall's attitude to the experience of airports and the behaviour of the people to be found in them was in contrast to his views about the actual experience of flying in a plane, generally performed well and supported this understanding with appropriate references to the passage. However, those who misunderstood the initial references to jars of mustard and queues at security usually failed to appreciate the effect of the almost lyrical descriptions of flying over the Alps or the view from a plane's window while being stacked over London and consequently produced responses that showed, at best, only a partial understanding of the writer's views.

On the whole, however, it was encouraging to note that many candidates were able to identify some variety of tone and to highlight the contrast between the 'then' and 'now' of the flying experience.

When preparing for this unit, candidates are advised that the key word in question 1 is 'what' and that in question 2 is 'how'. However, all tasks in Section A test understanding of both the reading passages and the questions set on them. Many candidates' answers for Tasks 2 and 3 would have improved significantly had they made clear both to themselves and to the Examiner, at the start of their answer, what, for example, Nigel Tisdall's views about flying actually were, before going on to explain how he conveyed them. Such an approach would have resulted in much more clearly focused responses.

## **Section B Writing**

### **Question 4**

*Is it important for humans to fly?*

*Write the words of a talk to your class giving your views.*



**OR**

**Question 5**

*Write about a time when something did not go as planned.*

The majority of candidates produced their best performances in the writing tasks for Section B and the two tasks appeared to have been attempted in equal proportion. There were many well written responses which contained much evidence of careful planning prior to writing.

The use of the speech format was very successful. Weaker answers digressed into areas of why we all need a holiday with plenty of global warming information. Stronger answers often drew on material in the reading extracts and conveyed in their own words the excitement of flight and the need to value the experience. Sense of structure was better evidenced here than in the previous session.

There were some lovely pieces on Question 5, much better organised and crafted than in January – although the need to start each account with the alarm clock going off is still compelling. There were plenty of broken limbs, missing birthday cakes and cancelled fights – with clever use of Tisdall's airport experience. Responses relating to the importance of flying were handled well in terms of content and organisation, with most adopting a convincing oral register. There were some pleasingly original pieces where planned days ended by being more exciting and special than expected. A few attempted highly imaginative situations and really tried to offer short stories where, for example, planned invasion of a space colony went wrong. Such responses generally fell short of expectations and had hasty, unconvincing endings due to pressure of time.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, some responses went on at too great (and unplanned) length and candidates are reminded of the importance of planning this task and focusing their points so that they are conveyed clearly to a reader. Similarly, concentration on careful and precise vocabulary choices, structured paragraphing and a consistent awareness of the need both to write in a register appropriate to a public examination and to observe the conventions of correct spelling and punctuation are central to achieving a creditable result in this section of the paper. Centres are strongly advised to reinforce to candidates that accuracy does matter and also to emphasise to candidates that legible handwriting is important – although the standard of handwriting is not a criterion in the writing mark scheme, it should be noted that the process of attempting to decipher partially illegible answers inevitably impedes an Examiner's impression of what is being expressed in the essay.

In conclusion, Examiners felt that they saw much good work in the scripts that they marked and that there is much to look forward to in the work of Year 11 candidates who will be taking this unit in future examination series.

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