

OCR Report to Centres

January 2012

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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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English (J350)

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A641 Reading Literary Texts

General comments

In this third session of the new specification, there were more entries than in June with centres continuing to take up the option to use themed tasks, either with a set text such as *Of Mice and Men* or with their own choice such as *Ethan Frome* and *Macbeth*. Centres must be clear that the requirement is to select **one** text from Different Cultures/Contemporary and **one** from Literary Heritage; these must be taken from the poetry and prose and **not** Shakespeare. Choosing *Of Mice and Men* means that the poetry must be by Owen, unless the centre opts for the themed task with their own choice of Literary Heritage poet; choosing to enter for Duffy or Zephaniah would require the set prose text to be either *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales*. A themed task can be used to cover all three texts, those from the set list or centre chosen or a combination of both these options; it is possible to write one combined assessment and there is no requirement to compare.

Although there was some clear variation in terms of length, each task was generally well within the 1000 word limit recommended so that the each candidate was not going over the total of 3000. Some would have benefited from developing their ideas further in order to access bands 1 and 2. The candidates appeared to have completed the tasks within the time limit allowed. Where notes were included with the work, as was evident with some candidates, these were very helpful in seeing how the final task had been produced.

In their dealing with the texts, candidates gave evidence of personal engagement, a sound and often detailed knowledge and a generally clear focus on the task. It was pleasing to see that centres had worked within the spirit of controlled assessment by thoroughly preparing their candidates without strait jacketing them into a specific plan. The move from coursework to controlled conditions has seen greater variety and independence of response, (albeit to tasks set by OCR), where candidates have used notes to develop their own ideas; there is a freshness of response and a sense of enjoyment in the folders submitted.

The social and historical context of texts was addressed in all three tasks, although there was some tendency to begin with the seemingly obligatory biography of the writer or the conditions at the time of writing. In the course of the essay there were often intermittent comments on context not grounded in the text or used to illuminate understanding. However, the very best used it to develop their exploration of the characters' loneliness in *Of Mice and Men*, the pride and honour of male characters in *Romeo and Juliet* and the ways in which Owen shows that, for soldiers, war was not a sweet and noble thing.

Whilst it is evident that candidates are using the PEE (point, evidence, evaluation) chain to enable them to comment on language, it was noted by moderators that it can become rather limiting and sometimes hinders the development of ideas about the text. Where a whole essay is set out in this way (especially where PEE is written down the side of the response), it does not allow for a cohesive response. Many candidates repeated the quotation in their explanation or simply translated it. "In this quote" frequently opened a sentence and references were often over-long. An ability to explore the effects of language (especially in poetry essays), as opposed to either explaining the meaning or giving a general statement such as "This makes the reader feel sympathy" or "This shows that Owen was bitter about war", signals a candidate appreciating how language works and often signals a move into band 4.

For achievement in band 3 and above, focus on the writer needs to go beyond merely naming him/her and must show an awareness of the writer's intentions, closely supported by an analysis of the techniques employed and their effects, becoming more perceptive and sophisticated for bands 1 and 2.

Candidates were generally well prepared, and the quality of the responses was consistent across all three genres, with that on poetry being sometimes slightly stronger. In some folders there was evidence of development of skills over time, and in these the second or third essay was stronger. It was pleasing to note that in general the tasks were addressed and candidates had a secure understanding of the texts.

Most of the assessment, annotation and summative comments were clear and helpful. The majority kept strictly to the band descriptors and the most useful identified examples of the criteria in the body of the response as well as giving a concise summary at the end or on the cover sheet. There was much more annotation and commentary in this session, which was very helpful as a means of justifying the final marks. It should be noted that the cover sheet requires summative comments from the teacher rather than the question answered.

Question specific comments

THEMED TASKS

*To what extent does the writer make you feel sympathy for **one** or **two** characters in the text(s) you have studied?*

This task was used effectively across all three genres, especially with *Of Mice and Men* and a selection of Owen's poems, where the candidates explored how the writer makes the reader feel sympathy for soldiers at war. Candidates made their selection from virtually all the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, reflecting on how racism, sexism and the American Depression (and the itinerant lifestyle) affected those on the ranch. The appreciation of prejudice as well as an awareness of Lennie's mental difficulties encouraged some strong personal responses, often grounded in detail from the text, and the best explored the ways in which Steinbeck's language affected the reader's feelings of sympathy. In responding to Owen's poetry, candidates identified the horrific conditions, the youthfulness of the soldiers sent to fight, and both the physical and mental suffering of the soldiers. As will be seen in the comments relating to the set task on Owen, the best responses were grounded in an appreciation of the language and structure of the text. It was good to see one centre branching out and submitting an exploration of *Ethan Frome* which provided rich opportunities for some perceptive analysis.

How does the writer present particular attitudes and beliefs in the text you have studied?

This task was used with regard to *Macbeth* and was well focused on context with candidates making reference to James 1st and the divine right of kings, witchcraft, the supernatural and superstitions. Lady Macbeth's evil nature and her controlling personality were used to challenge the idea of women being inferior in the Elizabethan period. Macbeth's kingship was explored, showing awareness of his sins and his guilt. There was appreciation of dramatic effectiveness but a need for more analysis of language. There were also some responses to Owen, with candidates opting to write about *Dulce et Decorum Est*, *Disabled* and *Spring Offensive* and these tended to take the same line of argument as those responding to the set Owen question, in that he challenges the attitude that it was a noble thing to die for your country.

PROSE OR LITERARY NON-FICTION

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

"Guys like us are the loneliest guys in the world". How far does the relationship between George and Lennie challenge this idea?

A substantial number of responses focused on the ways in which characters are lonely. Some went on to look at how George and Lennie's relationship makes them different; many omitted to explore this and therefore lost focus, since the task focuses explicitly on this relationship. Given that the tasks remain the same for the second year of the specification (January and June 2012), it is advised that centres take note of this advice for their submission in June. The best answers used other relationships to highlight what is different about George and Lennie; some explored the extent to which either or both of George and Lennie are lonely in spite of their friendship.

Responses to this task showed candidates enjoying the opportunity to write about the central relationship and appreciating the contextual reasons for characters' loneliness, referring to the lack of stability and of trust and the harshness of ranch life. Some secure middle band responses explored the differences between George and Lennie's relationship and those of others on the ranch, often picking up on Lennie's cry of "Not us, because I got you to look after me and you got me to look after you". There was some insight evident in comments referring to the way that even George and Lennie were, at times, lonely. There was a tendency to explore the ways in which Steinbeck presents the theme of loneliness and discuss which characters are lonely and why, rather than using examples of these other characters to show how the relationship between George and Lennie is different; to access the top bands, candidates needed to ensure this tight focus on the task set, with quotations being used to show an understanding of the writer's purpose and of how meaning is created. Lower band responses generally commented in a straightforward way on how and why characters are lonely, with some reflection on how George and Lennie support each other, but a greater degree of narrative where the relevance was implicit.

Notes From a Small Island by Bill Bryson

Explore the ways in which Bryson creates entertaining descriptions of the hotels and other accommodation he stays in during his tour of Britain.

This session saw this text being used for the first time. There was evidence of appreciation of Bryson's humour and of a straightforward understanding of the language devices used. At band 5 level this tended to lead to explanation of the reference used, with some commentary on how it created specific effects beginning to show at band 4.

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

*Explore how Austen makes **one** or **two** characters appear ridiculous to the reader.*

Candidates who opted to write on this task chose Mr Collins, and this elicited relevant responses to him in terms of his behaviour and attitudes, especially towards Lydia, Elizabeth and Lady Catherine. The higher band responses focussed not only on what he does, but on the means by which Austen presents him to the reader, with some exploration of the letters and some evident appreciation of the humour created at his expense.

DRAMA: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Romeo and Juliet

*How does Shakespeare show the importance of pride and honour to **one** or **two** male characters in the play?*

Whilst Tybalt, Capulet and Romeo were the characters generally selected, the roles of Mercutio and Friar Lawrence were also mentioned. As was seen in January, some candidates diluted the strength of their exploration by dealing with too many characters, and centres are advised that the instruction to deal with one or two characters is intended to enable candidates to deal with them in more detail and depth. Most responses began well but then lost focus and there was a tendency to recount the scene, rather than analyse.

Candidates showed a strong engagement with the play. Strong middle band responses showed a secure knowledge and understanding, with some awareness of how characters revealed their sense of pride and honour in different ways, and some appreciation of the difference between pride and honour. To access the top two bands, candidates needed to explore the language and dramatic devices used to present pride and honour in the male characters, using short, apt quotations as the basis for analytical comment rather than explanation. Lower band responses tended to focus on characters' actions, often leaving the link to pride and honour more implicit than explicit, and using quotation to support an account of events. Such quotations were often introduced by paraphrase and then followed by a translation. It was pleasing to note the sustained use of the text at virtually all levels and the absence of confusion with the modern film version(s) of the play.

Julius Caesar

Explore how Shakespeare presents ambition and its consequences in Julius Caesar.

There was a small number of responses to this text, focusing on Caesar's abuse of power and the dilemma faced by Brutus, with some appreciation of its consequences and the way it led to the deaths of characters. Understanding of characters and their actions was at a straightforward level, with some relevant textual evidence used to support ideas. Comments on quotations tended to explain and paraphrase rather than analyse, and a more critical response might have led to an award of a mark in band 3 and above.

POETRY: SELECTED POEMS

Wilfred Owen

How far does Owen challenge the idea that it is a sweet and noble thing to die for one's country?

The poems chosen to answer this question often included *Dulce et Decorum Est* (from which the reference to "sweet and noble" in the task is drawn), *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *The Sentry*, *Dead Beat*, *Strange Meeting* and *Disabled* and it was pleasing to see the level of understanding, with very little confusion or distortion of meaning, evident in the candidates' responses. There was some understanding of Owen's experiences of war and of how this affected his attitude to it, all being able to see how his poetry expresses his negative feelings. At the lower levels this was expressed in terms of the physical suffering and by reference to the horrible conditions faced by the soldiers, with some relevant quotations used as evidence, whereas the more secure middle band responses also showed some insight into the mental suffering of the soldiers. Whilst there was some awareness of Owen's tone in the stronger candidates' responses, and in the top band 3 and band 2 responses an ability to reflect on how choices of language create meaning, the majority tended to name devices and be more limited in their ability to explore the effect created. At the lower band level, candidates showed some straightforward understanding and often self-penalized by writing very little. Although it was evident that only the stronger candidates understood the reference within the question, they were all able to show a grasp of how Owen's poetry reveals the horrors of war, making their responses more directly relevant to the question than was often the case with *Of Mice and Men*.

Carol Ann Duffy

Explore how Duffy presents everyday experiences in her poetry.

It was pleasing to see some lively, personal engagement with the texts, with *Before You Were Mine*, *The Good Teachers* and *In Mrs Tilscher's Class* being the most popular choices. All the responses showed understanding of the key ideas in the poems, with those in band 4 moving beyond a tendency to explain and describe into some exploration of how meaning is conveyed. The descriptive details were clearly evocative for the candidates and they enjoyed giving examples; higher band responses were able to show how the language and structure of the poems were effective in conveying the thematic concerns.

A642 Imaginative Writing

General comments

Only a small number of centres entered candidates for this unit in this session. The responses that were submitted, however, did demonstrate strengths and weaknesses from which future candidates can learn.

It was pleasing that centres in this session submitted their folders much more efficiently and presented them much more clearly than in the last session. It would aid the moderation process, however, if samples were not presented in bulky folders or individual plastic pockets. There should also be a clear indication on the cover sheet of which tasks the candidates have attempted and a breakdown of the marks awarded. Inclusion of the candidates' notes is also recommended because it may help the moderator to understand more fully what the candidate was attempting to achieve.

Many centres made helpful summative comments on the cover sheet and annotated the responses to the tasks in some detail, with clear references to the mark scheme to show how they had arrived at the final mark. Where this was not the case it was often much harder to support the final marks arrived at by the centre.

In the highest bands students adapted the style of their responses with some assurance to suit the purposes of their pieces, making effective use of vocabulary to engage their audience. Although there were often illuminating links between the two responses at this level, centres are reminded that the two pieces are assessed separately. At this level candidates would benefit from more careful consideration of how to structure sentences and whole texts more effectively.

In the middle bands were mostly straightforward responses that that were relevant to the task. Paragraphs were generally used and were usually organised around one idea but there were few links between them. There was some use of varied sentences with accurate punctuation between them but they were often lengthy and not fully controlled. Most candidates at this level could improve their attainment by more careful planning of the content and language of their responses.

In the lower bands candidates sometimes expressed their ideas clearly. Their vocabulary was often limited, however, and would benefit from more careful planning before the assessment. They should be encouraged to make their sentences clearer by avoiding linking a long sequence of clauses with "and" and "so". These responses were often very brief and had unclear openings and very limited endings.

At all levels it was pleasing to see an improvement since the last session in the accurate use of punctuation between sentences but there are still very few candidates who demonstrate control of punctuation within sentences.

Comments on Individual Tasks

Section A – Media

- 1 *Write an article for a local newspaper entitled 'The Worst Place in Britain' in which you highlight the problems and shortcomings of a particular town or area.*

The core task was responded to effectively by most candidates. They gave detailed descriptions of contenders for the title of worst town and generally used an appropriate form and style. As in the last session there was some evidence that centres had provided too much scaffolding for the work, so that some candidates worked through the same list of features of the worst place.

- 2 (a) *Write a letter to the local newspaper arguing strongly against the views expressed in the article.*

As in the last session this was the most popular satellite task. Yet again those who chose the letter task found the straightforward format supported them to organise their ideas well. The best answers developed an argument throughout the text with clearly linked paragraphs while those in the middle bands tended simply to respond point by point to the original article.

- 2 (b) *Write the words of a podcast from a person describing how they have been affected by living in the town or area.*

There were more podcasts in this session than last time. Candidates were sometimes successful in creating a character with a distinct voice but there was tendency to repeat the material from the core task, in the same style.

- 2 (c) *As a follow-up to the article, the local newspaper has organised a competition asking readers to propose a specific suggestion for improving the town or area. The best entries will be printed in the newspaper. Write your entry for the competition.*

There were a very limited number of responses to this task. Candidates made a clear detailed response to the task but did not always organise their ideas clearly. By not specifying a form the task allows centres and/or candidates to contextualise the task by making their own choices of form and structure.

Section B – Text Development

Centres' comments on the Text Development tasks sometimes suggested that they were taking into account candidates' understanding of the source texts as well as their writing skills – which is not the aim of the assessment.

- 1 *Imagine a meeting between two characters, each from a different text you have read, heard or seen. Write the story of this meeting.*

Centres had once more responded to this task with an imaginative range of meetings between interesting combinations of characters. In this session there was evidence that candidates were taking more care to establish situations and characters and responses tended to have a much better focus on the actual encounter and its significance for the characters.

- 2 (a) *Write a monologue in prose or poetry in which one of the characters in your story expresses his/her thoughts about the other character.*

The monologue was less popular this time. Those who chose it were able to adopt a suitable style and tone for the monologue but tended to repeat material from the core task and were uncertain how to end the piece.

- 2 (b) *The place where the characters in your story met has become famous. Write a guidebook entry for this place.*

A very limited number of candidates have attempted the guidebook task, which continues to suggest a continued uncertainty about the format even though it offers a useful alternative for those who may find the empathetic style of the other satellite tasks less appealing.

- 2 (c) *Ten years have passed. Write a letter from one character to the other describing how life has changed over those ten years.*

As in the last session most candidates chose the letter task and found the task accessible and the format supportive.

Overall

The centres that submitted folders in this session were mostly doing so for the first time. They deserve congratulations for their effective preparation of candidates for the demands of controlled assessment in imaginative writing.

The responses sampled suggest that candidates from a range of levels of ability enjoyed the tasks offered and were able to demonstrate an appropriate level of achievement. Moderators enjoyed reading the candidates' work and were pleased to see that many centres are taking advantage of the opportunity to contextualise controlled assessment tasks and producing a wide range of responses to the tasks.

A643 Speaking and Listening

General comments

With many centres choosing not to enter candidates at this stage, the entry was, as expected, fairly 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 the centre's practice.

Task setting

The requirement is to cover the three contexts familiar to many centres from the legacy specification. However, there is the new requirement of the "real-life context in and beyond the classroom". This is not an extra, but must be included as an aspect of any one of the basic three contexts, at the discretion of a centre and as appropriate to the situation. It was clear from this entry that centres are adapting and developing new activities to take this requirement into account. The "real-life context" is more than just subject matter which has to extend beyond the classroom: it is a matter of purpose and audience. Successful tasks for this requirement often linked it to the drama-focussed context or to role play of some form: mock interviews, reality shows and government think tanks, for example. Where centres adapted tasks for the individual extended contribution, candidates presented a talk to the class as representatives of charities or the 'audience' became a real-life context, such as government representatives, or groups of teachers/parents. For the group activity, to give their discussion a real-life purpose, students were often asked to consider issues as members of the Student Council. 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, and there is, of course, no requirement to bring in outside visitors to satisfy this requirement. A few centres still set tasks for real-life context which were not valid, for example general discussions on attitudes to war, various social and moral issues, or a "talk to the class" on work experience. Most of these tasks, with a minor alteration in terms of purpose or audience could have been adapted to fulfil the requirement properly.

For further support and guidance to fulfil the demands of the "real-life context", attention is drawn to the Training and Guidance DVD issued to centres in September 2011, which carefully explains whether or not each activity featured can be deemed real-life context. There is also a guidance document on the OCR website, and the Controlled Assessment Consultancy is always available to centres who would seek further advice on individual tasks. Through the consultancy, a centre's tasks may be validated.

There was evidence that centres are setting much more suitable tasks for the drama focussed activity and there were much firmer links to the assessment criteria for this context. Where tasks were based on drama or other literary texts, many centres had given candidates much more freedom to explore and adapt language in the creation of their roles: a reality TV show based on literary characters, for example. 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, and the vast majority of centres had avoided this approach.

Few centres linked Speaking and Listening activities with work for A652 Section B: Spoken Language; those that did tended to explore the language of an interviewer. It is hoped that as centres get used to the new specification they will take the opportunity of using Speaking and Listening to help prepare candidates for their Controlled Assessment task on Spoken Language.

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. These procedures are good practice because they help to prevent problems arising from staff absences or changes of staff, for example. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used for assessment. The OCR Controlled Assessment 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 description of activities, or if 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 also important that all the staff within a centre adopt a common approach to filling in the assessment forms and that good practice is shared. Comments on the forms should aim to explain the marks awarded to the moderator, not offer feedback to candidates on their performances.

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 records, often word processed, and it was only a minority of centres that had to be reminded of their responsibilities.

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 a 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 on a borderline failed to achieve the next band. 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. Centres are reminded that it is essential that all staff assessing Speaking and Listening watch and discuss the DVD issued to centres on an annual basis.

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 moderator. 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. Where centres had used the DVD to train staff, it was apparent in their

task setting, in their understanding of the real-life context and in their justifications of the marks awarded.

Administration

The administration of this unit, once again, could have been smoother. It is essential that centres acquaint themselves with deadlines and procedures.

Time was wasted and the moderation process protracted, by moderators having to chase centres for samples and forms that should have been sent with the mark sheets. Some centres are waiting for moderators to select the sample. For this unit the sample is centre selected and the sample of candidates' records (seven per teaching group), together with the moderator's copy of the mark sheets, a signed Centre Authentication Form and a completed Internal Standardisation Record should all be sent to the external moderator by the published deadline – 10th January or 15th May.

It is vital for the smooth running of the process that instructions regarding procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties in a centre, especially where some aspects are to be completed by colleagues who are not subject specialists.

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. The DVD issued to centres in September 2011 has a section entitled Administration, with very clear instructions to centres.

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

Conclusion

Attention is strongly drawn to OCR's Training and Guidance DVDs for this unit, issued to centres each September. These will build up to provide vital support for all centres, in assessment and task setting. The DVD issued in September 2011 paid particular attention the demands of the real-life context, and to appropriate task setting for drama-focussed activities. Future DVDs will focus on other areas to give centres a comprehensive set of guidelines and support.

As centres become more familiar with and confident in applying the new performance criteria, and in task setting to meet the new requirements, this unit should develop into a real success, with opportunities for candidates to achieve.

A680 Information and Ideas

Foundation Tier

This report might be usefully read alongside the Teacher Guide for A680, which can be found on the OCR website.

The question paper proved to be accessible and of an appropriate level of demand for the tier. Candidates clearly engaged with the reading material: Text A on the effects on young people of excessive mobile phone use; Text B on young people's 'slavish' use of electronic devices. The two Writing questions proved to be equally popular.

The majority of candidates have been clearly prepared for the format of the foundation tier question and answer booklet. As pointed out in previous reports, the spaces provided for answers reflect the relative weightings of questions. It was encouraging to see some candidates use one of the three pages provided for the Writing answer for effective planning. Some candidates preferred to use bullets and others mind maps for their planning; such strategies enabled them to give proper consideration to both the content and organisation of their answer.

Candidates should not try to squeeze writing into the margins nor should they write on pages that say 'PLEASE DO NOT WRITE ON THIS PAGE'. If, for any of the questions, candidates feel the need to write more than the space in the booklet provides, they should do so on additional sheets of examination paper which bear their name, candidate number and relevant question number. Additional sheets should be attached to the booklet by means of a treasury tag.

Individual Questions

Section A – Non-Fiction and Media

The majority of candidates used the relevant text in responding to Questions 1 and 2. There were, however, instances of some candidates introducing their own opinions. Candidates should be reminded that both these questions are tests of reading, and even brief asides giving their own views about the topic cannot be rewarded.

Question 1

1(a) – 1(c). Question 1 begins with a number of questions requiring short responses.. The space for answers is deliberately restricted, to signal to candidates the relative brevity required 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 should come. Some incorrect answers were the result of not reading the question with sufficient care. For example, 1(c) spaces were provided to record a cause and an effect. Clearly these responses are not interchangeable.

1(d). Examiners saw a range of responses to this question. Successful responses were clearly focused on the question, showed evidence of the use of own words and included a range of relevant points. The best answers demonstrated a sustained focus on the 'effects' of excessive mobile phone use on young people. Less successful responses tended to list mechanically points made in the passage, without achieving a clear focus on the key word 'effects'. Weaker responses introduced material that was not actually relevant to the question, for example, details of the research given in the passage. The weakest responses lifted chunks of material from the

passage, sometimes indiscriminately, with little attempt to tailor the material to the question or gave their views on the topic.

Question 2

Most candidates took note of the relative weightings of Questions 2(a) and 2(b) – 6 and 14 marks respectively. Candidates who use a continuation sheet for Question 2(a) run the risk of under-performing in Question 2(b). Indeed some who wrote excessively for 2(a) did not write enough for 2(b). Candidates should be reminded that there is no requirement to be exhaustive in their answers. Effective selection and pertinent comment are common requirements in these two part-questions.

2(a). Successful responses identified specific features and commented on particular effects they create for a reader. For example: 'The cartoon shows a baby on a computer typing its first word. This is humorous but also quite worrying, showing the idea that younger people get into technology too early in their lives'. Some responses pointed out the incongruous nature of the photograph when considered alongside the text. Stronger comments on headings considered the effect of particular words. For example: 'The phrase "slavish use" is worrying because it makes you think the technology is controlling young people's lives'. By contrast, less successful answers took refuge in generalisations: 'the heading is really big, catchy and stands out'; 'the picture is big and very colourful, and will make young people want to read the paper'. Candidates who generalised tended to write a lot for little reward.

2(b). Successful responses provided clear evidence of an ability to analyse, commenting specifically on the ways in which information and language conveyed the worries some people have about young people's use of electronic devices. Only the strongest answers demonstrated a critical understanding of the effects of particular words. For example: 'The phrase "like a drug" shows just how addicted young people are to social networking. This idea of a drug-like addiction would certainly be alarming to parents.' Thoughtful, personal comment on the effects of a few carefully-selected words is a better strategy than a mechanical listing of words or devices (eg 'They use a simile "like a drug"').

Some less successful responses tended to supply unsubstantiated assertions such as 'The writer uses emotive language'. Sometimes terms were deployed but not meaningfully: eg 'There are declaratives/connotations/imperatives'. Generalised comment such as 'the writer uses negative words' should be developed by reference to specific words and the particular negative effect created. The quality of analytical comment is a discriminator for this question, and in preparing for this question candidates should be given opportunities to articulate how and why particular words are effective.

Section B – Writing

Questions 3 and 4

The following, taken from last June's report, is relevant too for this session: '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.'

Candidates should be discouraged from using additional sheets for the writing: the desired outcome is quality, and not quantity of writing. Some examiners felt that responses might usefully spend the last minutes of the examination checking what they have written rather than continuing to write until the end of the exam.

Successful responses showed evidence of a conscious shaping of material to engage the interest of readers. In these responses vocabulary, language devices and varied sentence structures were used to achieve deliberate effects. However, a number of candidates would benefit from targeted revision in a number of key areas: effective paragraphing, accurate sentence divisions and correct use of upper and lower case letters.

For Question 3, content was generally sound and, at times, both developed and illuminating. However, only the strongest responses kept the audience – parents – firmly in mind. Candidates were generally able to draw on their own experience of social networking, though some candidates relied too heavily on the content of one or both of the Reading texts.

There were interesting and thoughtful responses to Question 4. Stronger responses were clearly heartfelt and unashamedly honest about their feelings and relationships. Some candidates explored at some length the personal qualities that made their friends admirable. Less successful responses were rarely able to do this, but instead reminisced about shared experiences, opting for narrative rather than a mixture of description and explanation. There was repetition of simple and underdeveloped points such as 'He is always there for me' and 'she makes me laugh'. Some struggled to develop explanations of why they admired their chosen person and lapsed into basic descriptions of hair, eyes and clothes.

Higher Tier

General comments

Overall, candidates responded well to this paper and found the subject matter engaging and both the reading material and questions to be accessible. Only a very small number failed to produce responses of at least satisfactory length to all four questions. There was a larger entry for the paper than has been the case in previous sessions with the result that there was evidence of achievement at all levels and certainly more examples of high level responses than has been the case previously. It would appear that Centres, in particular those new to OCR, are now becoming more confident in their entry policy and there were many fewer candidates optimistically entered for the Higher Tier paper when Foundation Tier would have been a more suitable option. Assessors also were of the opinion that the extra maturity resulting from taking the examination in Year 11 was significantly to the candidates' benefit.

Responses to the reading tasks in Section A indicated that almost all candidates had a clear understanding of the main points of the two reading passages although there was also evidence that a full understanding of the requirements of the questions was less secure – further details concerning this point will be covered in the following section of this report. It was encouraging to note that despite the requirement to answer two questions on the first passage (with the obvious implications for time allocation), most candidates produced full length answers to the question on the extract from *A Walk in the Woods* most of which were of equivalent, if not higher, standard to their response to Question 2. As has been the case in previous sessions, the writing tasks in Section B often led to candidates producing their best work and many responses to both tasks were a pleasure to read. It should also be noted that the writing responses were generally better focused and more tightly structured than in the past; candidates and their teachers have clearly taken notice of the advice given in last summer's report to spend no more than 50 minutes on this section of the paper.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A Reading

Question 1

The day I survived a very grizzly bear attack.

Using details from the article, **outline concisely**:

- *what you learn about black bears*
- *the different thoughts and feelings Guy Grieve experiences during his encounter with the bear.*

Use your own words as far as possible.

It is important for candidates to remember that this is a summary question and is, therefore, primarily a test of retrieval skills. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the content of the passage but only a small number focused their responses clearly on the specific topics stated in the rubric to the question, with the result that they did not illustrate the overview of the subject matter required to access the highest mark bands that their understanding suggested was within their reach. The most successful responses to this task were sub-divided to focus on the two key aspects of the task (what is learnt about bears and the thoughts and feelings of the writer), avoided the inclusion of irrelevant details and unnecessary comment and showed clearly that the passage had been understood through a judicious use of the candidates' own words. Less successful responses tended to write at length, without clear focus on the requirements of the task, and to include unnecessary comment about the writer's use of language and the effects of the photograph which were more appropriate to an answer to Question 2. Such responses usually gave evidence that the passage had been understood although they seldom contained sufficient overview of the material and the task to achieve a mark any higher than in Band 4. The least successful responses revealed only a limited understanding of both passage and task and tended to consist of first person narratives containing advice on how to escape from a predatory black bear, usually – but not in all cases – with some awareness of the content of the passage.

In general, Assessors were of the opinion that although there were some very good answers indeed, this was the question that offers most scope for improvement in the performance of candidates. As mentioned above, this is a summary question and candidates are encouraged to acquire a reliable summary-writing method. In future papers, as in this one, Question 1 will always identify a specific area or areas of the passage for candidates to summarise. A recommended approach to answering it successfully is to read the passage carefully, focusing on and making notes of the points directly relating to the elements identified in the question, ensuring that the full range of these elements is covered and then reorganising these points into an appropriate order. Once this has been done, then candidates should attempt to write their own version of the specific required aspects of the topic, using their own words sufficiently to show that they have understood the original but not attempting to find substitute words of their own for every expression in the original, as this approach can result in a distortion of the points originally made.

Thoughtful and thorough note-making is very much the key to success in this task (and Assessors noted that candidates who scored most highly had usually taken the time to make such notes). Candidates should not be over-concerned about this being a time-consuming process. Section A tests *reading* and it is, therefore, important that time is spent in practising this important skill. A fully successful response to Question 1 in this paper could have been written in no more than 200 words, to include about a dozen focused points, as long as these were evenly distributed between the two elements of the question. If candidates have made sufficiently

detailed preparatory notes (and, therefore, have a clear idea of what they are going to include in their final response) it should not take them very long to write it.

Question 2

The day I survived a very grizzly bear attack

How does Guy Grieve use language to make the account of his encounter with the bear so terrifying?

In your answer refer closely to the passage.

Whereas the key word in Question 1 is *what*, that in Question 2 is *how*, and it is important that candidates keep this clearly in mind when writing their responses. This particular question required a specific consideration of how the writer's use of language made his experience with the bear so terrifying. The most successful responses focused consistently on these two aspects of the question, identifying appropriate quotations from the passage and then explaining how the writer's choice of words succeeded in conveying the terrifying nature of his experience. An example of this was the candidate who selected the phrase '70-stone killing machine' and then went on to comment that the phrase suggested that the bear was 'devoid of emotion, and completely intent on its purpose'. Such a comment shows a clear appreciation of the effect of the imagery used by the writer. Less successful responses tended to identify appropriate examples of language use, for which they were credited, but did little more than attempt to analyse at best, with comments such as 'the writer is terrified here and we know this as he repeats the word 'terrified'. This shows that he is terrified.' The least successful concentrated mainly on identifying figures of speech such as alliteration and the rule of three in 'slowly, sedately, stealthily' and then making pre-prepared comments such as 'and this draws the reader in and makes them want to read on' without making any reference to the requirements of the question. Overall, Assessors commented that most candidates attempted to write analytically about the passage and to show an awareness of how the writer's use of language in particular conveyed his feelings during the episode described. There were some very good responses which remained clearly focused on the requirements of the task and included perceptive appreciation of the writer's skills. At the other end of the scale, there were a small number of responses that did little more than write a general summary of the passage with very little reference to the question, but these were encouragingly few. By far the majority of responses were placed in the Band 5 – Band 3 range and the following comments are intended to provide advice to future candidates as to how they might ensure that their performance in similar questions reaches the upper end of this range, at least.

One of the main criteria for the Band 4 category is that a response contains 'appropriate supporting references' and 'an attempt to analyse' whereas to achieve a mark in Band 3, it is necessary for a candidate to use 'careful supporting references' along with 'some analytical comment'. Although some responses consisted of little more than generalised attempts at analysis, without any supporting references or quotations (which kept them to Band 5 at best), most candidates successfully identified some appropriate or careful supporting references. What differentiated those achieving Band 3 marks and above was the quality of the attempt at analysis. A response containing fully apposite quotations is likely to achieve a Band 4 mark; however, if there is only limited explanation of these quotations (such as 'this show that the appearance of the bear was terrifying') then there is no reason to move the response into a higher band. However, an attempt to consider the impact of a chosen quotation, in particular by exploring into the implications of the language *within the context of its use in the passage* is likely to result in the response moving into a higher mark band. It is not necessary for candidates to write at great length when answering Questions 2 and 3 (time restraints do not encourage this) but it is important that they select three or four fully appropriate quotations or references to illustrate the points required in the question and then explain as fully as they can how these examples convey the particular aspect of the writer's purpose which the question identifies. It is

not necessary for candidates to hunt out and identify by name various linguistic devices used by the writer: what is far more important to the process of achieving a good mark is that they can explain convincingly the *effects* of those devices on the reader.

Centres should also be reassured that although the question referred candidates to the writer's use of language in particular, full credit was given to those candidates who made convincing analytical comments about the contribution of the photograph and also of the information ('70-stone') and other presentational features contained in the passage.

Question 3

A Walk in the Woods

How does Bill Bryson make the account of his experience in the woods so entertaining?

In your answer, refer closely to the passage.

Much of what has been said about Task 2 – especially the comments about focusing clearly on the wording of the question – applies equally to candidates' performance in response to Task 3.

Overall, candidates responded well to the Bryson extract. Many appreciated the humour contained in the account and it is a comment on their responses to the passage that most candidates scored as well or better on this question than on Question 2. Although there were some questionable interpretations of what made it entertaining (it is unlikely, for example, that the author's reference to the weather being warm enough for him to sleep in his underwear was intended as nothing more than a piece of circumstantial detail) most candidates clearly appreciated the contrast in the reactions of the writer and his companion. The most successful responses clearly depicted the humorous contrast between Bryson's mounting hysteria and Katz's laconic and increasingly sarcastic ripostes. Similarly, there were convincing explanations as to how the tension of the account was emphasised by the use of the single word paragraph, 'Bear!' and how this was effectively undercut both by the writer's reference to the occasion when a skunk had sounded like a stegosaurus and his description of the inadequacies of his knife and torch and how this strand of the account was reduced to absurdity by Katz's offer of nail clippers as a weapon followed by Bryson's witheringly sarcastic comment about pedicures which was finally capped by his companion's insouciant response. Although not all candidates explained their reaction to the episode in quite such detail there was clear evidence that many appreciated the entertaining nature of the account and how this was achieved both through structure and language; as one candidate perceptively commented about the writer's language towards the unknown creature: "Please withdraw"; this suggests that Bryson is an alien in the wilderness as he uses the language of a scholar to a dumb creature, assuming it has knowledge of human etiquette."

As a footnote, it was interesting that no candidate commented that one of the key factors contributing to the enjoyable nature of the account was that, from the very fact that it was written in the first person and in the past tense, the readers were aware from the start that, whatever the mysterious beast was, both characters survived the encounter!

Section B Writing

Question 4

'Be Prepared'

Write a magazine article, giving information and advice about how to prepare for a particular activity; for example, a camping holiday, a foreign visit, a work experience week etc.

OR

Question 5

Things that go Bump in the Night

Write about some of the things that you found confusing or scary when you were younger and explain how you feel about them now.

Candidates apparently found both tasks to be fully accessible and responded well to both of them. As has been the case in previous series, many candidates performed at higher level in their answers to this Section than to the reading tasks in Section A. There was a fairly even distribution between the two tasks, with Question 5 being slightly more popular. In answer to Question 4 most candidates wrote about the suggested topics, with work experience and holidays being the most popular. Question 5 opened up a wider range of responses, and some of these were very engaging, mature and thoughtful, with many accounts of being scared of the dark and of monsters under the bed/wardrobe.

Although Question 4 tended to be answered usually in a very straightforward style there were, nevertheless, some strong individual responses which brought a quirky and entertaining tone to the task, therefore 'showing off' a mature manipulation of language, eg, 'Holidays. The one chance you and your family get a year to completely exhaust any tolerance you might have had for one another'; or, 'Always remember on a camping trip that Organised Chaos is better than mere chaos.' As well as a large number of accounts dealing with camping holidays or trips abroad there was also much sensible advice offered, very often in a lively and sparky tone, on preparing for exams, a new baby, the 2012 Olympics – and, in one case, the end of the world! Question 5 demonstrated candidates' abilities to write clearly and, at times, with some imaginative crafting. The most successful responses were highly sophisticated and tended to focus on one or two particular fears as opposed to listing all the childhood fears the candidate had suffered from; darkness, death and clowns appear to be the most common. Some responses were highly sophisticated, expressive and enjoyable to read. By far the majority of responses were clearly personal, autobiographical accounts rather than attempts at fictional recreations; candidates benefited from taking such an approach and in relishing the opportunity to open up about irrational and unusual fears that they had experienced.

Nearly all candidates wrote responses to the Writing Task of adequate length; although some lost control of structure through attempting to write at too great length, it would appear that most had taken note of the comments in previous reports about excessive length and had tried hard to tailor their material to fit the time available.

As always, the standard of performance in the AO3 iii element varied; the most successful responses contained a wide range of accurately controlled sentence structures with correctly spelt, apposite vocabulary and sophisticated and confident use of punctuation. Less successful responses showed particular uncertainty in sentence separation and imprecise use of punctuation devices such as the apostrophe. Assessors expressed some concern about uncertain paragraphing even in scripts that, in all other areas, were of a high quality; candidates for this examination in future are reminded of the importance of careful planning of their writing and the need to paragraph their accounts in order to communicate their points clearly to the reader.

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