

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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

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

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

English (J350)

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A641 Reading Literary Texts

General comments

In this session, centres continued to take up the option to use themed tasks, mainly with a set text such as *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet* or Owen, but sometimes with texts of their own choice such as *Macbeth* and *Unarranged Marriage* (Bali Rai). These set texts continue to be the most popular choices and it was pleasing to note that very few centres had entered forbidden combinations; where this was the case, it was usually of Steinbeck with either Duffy or Zephaniah.

Centres must be clear that the requirement is to select **one** text from Different Cultures/Contemporary and **one** from Literary Heritage and these must be taken from the poetry and prose and **not** Shakespeare. Choosing *Of Mice and Men*, *Tsotsi*, *Notes from a Small Island* or *The Kindness of Strangers* means that the poetry must be 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*.

In this first session of the new, 2013 tasks, there was evidence of some uncertainty about the need to submit in the session of entry the tasks for that particular year rather than the year in which they were written. Centres have been advised of this where it was a particular concern and it is hoped that this problem will not be apparent in the June entry.

Although there was some variation in terms of length, each task was generally well within the 1000 word limit recommended so that each candidate was not going over the total of 3000. Some may have benefited from developing the ideas further in order to access bands 1 and 2. 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, there was 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 generally worked within the spirit of controlled assessment by thoroughly preparing their candidates without strait jacketing them by means of providing a specific plan.

The move from coursework to controlled conditions has seen some evidence of greater variety and independence of response, albeit to tasks set by the board, 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. However, moderators have still reported concerns about heavily structured and teacher led responses and these centres have been instructed to include the candidates' notes in the next submission.

The social and historical context of texts was addressed in all three tasks and there was less of a tendency to begin with the seemingly obligatory biography of the writer or the conditions at the time of writing. The best responses used context to develop their exploration of the setting of texts, the fear between characters in *Of Mice and Men*, the anger and hatred caused by the feud in *Romeo and Juliet* and the ways in which Owen uses the natural world in his war poems.

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. Some candidates repeated the quotation in their explanation or simply translated it. "In this quote" frequently opened a sentence and references were often overly long. The ability to explore the effects of language, especially in poetry essays, as opposed to either explaining the meaning or give a general statement such as "This makes the reader feel sympathy" or "This

shows that Owen was bitter about war” signals the candidate appreciating how language works and often signals a move into band 4. Below this level, candidates often resorted to narrative and straightforward explanation of quotations and this generally indicates performance at band 5 and below.

In awarding band 3 and above, the 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. One moderator referred to centres referring to “analysis” in relation to anything that involved language and close reading. The phrase from the band 3 criteria of “secure critical response” was also used regularly, especially where writing sounded confident or assured, rather than in response to language.

The best candidates had a full and clear engagement with the works, gave well-chosen references with good analysis and evaluation, using relevant contextual elements to develop and illustrate the writers’, and their own, ideas. A few responses repeated the same range of quotations, and the same contextual ideas in a very similar essay structure. The candidate’s own personal approach and engagement to the texts and the questions is to be encouraged wherever possible.

Candidates were well prepared, and the quality of the responses was generally consistent across all three genres, with that on poetry being sometimes slightly stronger. In some folders, there was, however, 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.

Question specific comments

THEMED TASKS

How does the writer make the setting important in a text you have studied?

In exploring *Of Mice and Men*, many candidates described the setting(s) and talked about loneliness, The American Dream and the Depression period, as well as the male-orientated culture of life on the ranch. Higher level responses appreciated the impact of these "settings" on the lives of characters and the novel overall. In some cases the social, cultural and historical context was bolted-on and not entirely or successfully integrated into the essays.

Explore how the writer shows the unappealing side of human nature in a text you have studied.

Various types of undesirable or unappealing behaviours were discussed and evaluated and arranged in some sort of rank order, with appropriate support. Higher level responses were well referenced whereas less developed ones were more generalised and less precise. Whilst this task was mainly used for *Of Mice and Men*, with some effective evaluation of specific characters, often related effectively to the harshness of ranch life, it also prompted responses to the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as “this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen” and to family relationships in *Unarranged Marriage*.

PROSE OR LITERARY NON-FICTION

Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

“Maybe ever’body in the whole damn world is scared of each other.” Starting with the first encounter between Curley, George and Lennie in Section 2, explore how far Steinbeck persuades you to agree with Slim’s comment.

There were some secure responses which evaluated different types of fear, for example of bullying, discrimination, insecurity, with appropriate support. They also had some overview which held the essay together, instead of merely listing examples. The initial episode referred to in the question provides the opportunity for close analysis of the fear and tension and the prompt of “How far” should enable candidates to consider examples of relationships which do not demonstrate the same level of fear and aggression, such as that of George and Lennie, although it may be argued that at times Lennie is fearful of George’s reaction. Responses drew effectively on the social context, referring to the impact of the isolation, harshness of ranch life and destruction of dreams on the characters and their relationships.

DRAMA: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Romeo and Juliet

How does Shakespeare show the importance of anger to the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*?

There was some effective exploration of different characters, most notably Tybalt and Lord Capulet, the violence and aggression created by the feud and – in the higher band responses – appreciation not only of how these contribute to the tragedy but to the tone of the play through the language and structure. Lower band responses tended to be rather characterised by a more mechanical description of who is angry and why, with references used in a simple way to support what is said and done. Simply translating quotations into modern English, rather than make any meaningful comment, makes it difficult for candidates to access band 4 and above. The background of the feud and the context of the play were often used well to show the impact of anger.

Julius Caesar

How far does Shakespeare encourage you to admire Brutus?

Responses to Brutus were well developed, taking the opportunity to provide a balanced argument carefully supported with textual evidence. The social and literary context informed these essays, with understanding of the importance of honour and reputation as well as the nature of tragedy.

POETRY: SELECTED POEMS

Wilfred Owen

Explore some of the ways in which Owen presents the natural world in his poems.

This question prompted some thoughtful evaluation of the language and the ways in which the natural world is used by Owen to explore the impact of war on 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, some responses 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-penalised by writing very little.

Benjamin Zephaniah

How does Zephaniah show his feelings towards powerful British institutions in his poems?

There was only one entry for Zephaniah and so not enough evidence to make general comments.

A642 Imaginative Writing

General Comments

In general centres are congratulated for the way they have presented their folders. Almost all had made detailed annotation in the body of the work drawing attention to candidates' specific strengths and weaknesses. They had also written clear summative comments on candidates' cover sheets to explain the final mark awarded.

It would be helpful, however, if the summative comments personalised the statements from the mark scheme rather than copying them word for word. A clear breakdown of each mark on the cover sheet would clarify exactly what marks have been awarded for. It would also aid the moderation process if folders were not placed inside plastic pockets or card folders; simply stapling or tagging the folders saves moderators time unpacking and piecing together candidates' work.

Centres are also to be congratulated for the way they have prepared the candidates for the assessment. There is increasing confidence in how to approach the tasks and a greater willingness to try a range of approaches. This new confidence has supported candidates in producing some interesting and adventurous responses to the tasks.

There is, however, sometimes still an imbalance between the candidates' achievement in the two pieces; the second piece, in particular, is often much shorter and much weaker than the first. Although length is not a criterion, and there is no reason why the two pieces should not be of significantly different length, it may be hard for candidates to show "detailed development", as required in Band 3, in a very short piece.

In the middle bands candidates generally produced competent work with accurate spelling and some sentence variety. The pieces were developed in a straightforward way with a clear opening and an appropriate ending. These candidates could improve by choosing more effective vocabulary and using a greater variety of sentence structure for effect.

In the higher bands candidates produced some interesting and engaging work. Their choices of vocabulary were usually more ambitious and there was a clear attempt to use different types of sentence for effect. To improve, these candidates need to consider more carefully how they can use the structure of their piece and its links with the other piece to create more sophisticated effects on the reader.

Media

The increasing confidence of centres was seen in the variety of approaches to the core task. Some used the broadcast format to produce a monologue while others adopted the features of a documentary or created a short piece of drama. All these approaches were valid and led to some interesting and effective work.

The most popular satellite task was the letter to the producers about the broadcast. As in previous sessions, the letter format was supportive for students and enabled them to organise their ideas clearly with a specific audience in mind. There were very few examples of prose monologues or leaflets this session but it is to be hoped that centres will attempt these tasks in future sessions.

Where centres had attempted the monologues it was, perhaps, a sign of their growing confidence that their candidates had often written them in the form of poetry. In general, the achievement of candidates who chose to write poetry was in line with their performance in their

prose response to the other task but it was rarely better. There may well be an opportunity to write poetry in future sets of tasks and centres are encouraged to consider it as an option for candidates who can best demonstrate their achievement that way.

Text Development

George and Lennie were, yet again, the most popular choices for the core task, and they were placed by candidates in a wide range of interesting and unusual settings. It was good to see a wider range of texts being selected by candidates as a basis for the task, however, including characters from film and computer games. The most successful pieces here worked as stand-alone texts which did not rely on any previous knowledge of the characters involved.

The more detailed description of the setting was the most popular satellite task here. These responses were often very effective and, interestingly, many centres had chosen to write this piece before they wrote the core task to limit the repetition of material that is sometimes seen in these responses. There were very few examples of the radio advert or the newspaper article but it was noticeable that the few who had written newspaper reports sometimes spent too much time recounting events from the main piece and too little time on the interview itself.

Overall

In general, moderators enjoyed reading the responses submitted in this session. It is clear that centres' growing confidence is supporting their candidates in creating effective and imaginative 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. The Terminal Rule allows centres to use any of the Controlled Assessment units for final assessment, so some centres were obviously deferring their entry for this unit, until June.

Task setting

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

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

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

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

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

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

Record keeping

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

Centres must remember that candidates’ record sheets form a vital piece of evidence in the moderation process. If there is a lack of detail in the descriptions of activities, or where comments on performance have been “lifted” directly from the band descriptors with little or no linkage to individual candidate achievement, then it is extremely difficult to carry out the moderation of a centre and confirm a centre’s marks.

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

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

The Application of the Criteria

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

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

Internal Standardisation Procedures

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

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

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

Administration

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

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

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

Attention is drawn to the OCR website for instructions, a check list and copies of all relevant forms. However grateful acknowledgement is made to those, who got it right and enabled moderators to meet their deadlines.

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

A680 information and Ideas (Foundation Tier)

General Comments

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

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

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

Individual Questions

Section A – Reading

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Question 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Section B – Writing

Questions 3 and 4

Examiners saw the full range of performance.

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

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

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

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

Question 3

This asked candidates to write about a day which had been made memorable for them because of the weather. Successful responses wrote in an engaging magazine style, offering vivid descriptions of the weather and how it had played 'such an important part' in their 'memorable' day. There were, however, some responses that neglected to mention the weather or alluded to it only very fleetingly; often there was little sense of the style of a magazine article.

Candidates tended to write about weddings, sporting events and special trips where the weather dominated proceedings – usually to beneficial effect. Other candidates wrote at least equally well about weather creating some kind of disaster. A minority of weaker responses relied too heavily on the content on 'The Big Puddle' article and insufficiently on candidates' own experiences.

Question 4

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

A680 information and Ideas (Higher Tier)

General Comments

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

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

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

Question 1

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

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

Question 2

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

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

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

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

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

Question 3

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

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

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

Question 4

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

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

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

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

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

Question 5

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

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

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

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

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