

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/01
Reading Passage (Core)

General comments

Overall, candidates responded well to this paper and there were a pleasing number of responses of a high standard. The reading passage proved to be mainly accessible to all and the responses to the reading tasks in **Question 1** indicated that most candidates had a clear understanding of the main events. However, although the standard of written English exhibited by responses to **Question 2** was of at least a satisfactory standard, the use of the content of the passage to provide a basis for the development of ideas was slightly less successful than has been apparent in responses to previous, similar questions. This point will be dealt with more fully in the appropriate section of this report.

Despite their generally clear understanding of the extract from *A High Wind In Jamaica*, a significant number of candidates, however, proved to be less assiduous in their reading of the questions asked about it, with the result that many failed to score as many marks as their apparent understanding suggested they should have done through not following instructions closely; again, specific examples of these slips will be given in the comments on individual questions. A further, related point is that candidates are reminded to take note of the maximum marks available for each question. It is almost certain that a question which carries only one mark is likely to require a considerably shorter answer than a question which is worth three marks. Whereas most candidates answered three mark questions at an adequate length, many wrote at equally as much length in answering one mark questions, which, in fact, required only a few words in response. This led to two main results: the first being, very often, a failure to gain the one mark available because the answer contravened the question rubric and the second being that the candidate had used up time which could have been spent more profitably in response to the writing task in **Question 2**. It is important for candidates and their teachers to bear in mind that in order to reach grade C in this paper, candidates must perform at a consistently high standard. Failure to achieve the marks available on the straightforward questions as a result of not following instructions can have severe consequences.

Presentation and use of time

Although, as always, there were some candidates whose handwriting proved difficult to decipher, in general, most scripts were well presented with evidence that candidates had taken great care to arrange their responses neatly and clearly.

Most candidates seem to have found it possible to complete the whole paper within the time allowed, with little or no evidence of haste. Incomplete papers were very rare, but just occasionally candidates missed out parts of **Question 1**, perhaps as a result of approaching the paper with undue haste. However, as mentioned above, there were also examples of candidates who might have used their time more efficiently and allowed themselves longer to plan and write their responses to **Question 2** through answering some parts of **Question 1** more concisely.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) The question asked specifically for a *phrase of three words* to be identified; most candidates understood that this, therefore, required reference to three consecutive words from the passage. There were, in fact, two possible correct answers; either *dirty grey haze* or *grey haze hovered*. Examiners accepted a conflation of the two (*dirty grey haze hovered*) but did not credit responses which lifted the whole or a significant part of the opening sentence of the paragraph as such an answer did not focus on the requirements of the question.

- (b) This question asked candidates to give at least three distinct points about the spring mentioned in paragraph 1 of the passage and to use their own words as far as possible in doing so. There were four points that could have been made: the spring was by the roadside; it had been quite active *the day before*; *now* it had dried up (the information in italics was necessary for the mark to be awarded); it gave out occasional bursts of water/it was making gurgling sounds within. Most candidates managed to identify one or two of these points and a pleasing number noted all three. It is worth noting that the point most frequently omitted was the fact that the spring was by the roadside. Maybe it was thought that this was too obvious a point to mention, but candidates should be advised that obvious points in this type of question are equally important as any other ones. A surprisingly large number of candidates failed to score any marks for this question through misunderstanding the word *spring* and writing about the season of the same name.
- (c) Candidates responded well to this question and many achieved the full six marks available. Most succeeded in identifying three appropriate details (in fact, apart from the first sentence of the paragraph nearly every phrase was an appropriate answer) although explaining how each of these phrases suggested a sense of extreme heat proved a little more difficult. It is important for candidates to keep clearly in mind that they must convey clear evidence of their understanding and that an examiner cannot reward an answer which does no more than repeat what is stated in the selected phrase (e.g. *the bullocks could bear the soil no longer because their feet were stinging*). In the example just given, a little added detail such as, *the bullocks found it difficult to stand on the soil because it was so hot that it burned through their hooves* would have made all the difference.
- (d) This question proved surprisingly difficult; it asked for two words from paragraph 4 which suggested that the reef protected the children; it was not necessary that the words were consecutive although some candidates apparently believed that this had to be the case. The possible correct answers were: *guarded, stronghold, safe*. Only a comparatively few candidates achieved full marks on this question; possibly, others were looking for answers which were more subtle than those actually required.
- (e) Again, this question required little more than identifying some straightforward details. The first things the children did after dismounting from their horses were *to lay down* and *to look in the water*. Examiners also accepted *to jump in the water* as a correct response since some candidates clearly construed the first two actions as being one. However, these were the only acceptable responses.
- (f) This was a question which carried a maximum of three marks and instructed candidates to explain their answer in their own words as far as possible. There were two distinct points to make; the first was the straightforward one that the children saw corals and/or fish; one mark was awarded for mention of either or both of these details. The second thing mentioned that the children saw was the *forest-like growth which is a tropical sea bottom*. Candidates were not rewarded simply for lifting this statement direct from the passage as such an approach did not indicate that the image had been understood; those who referred to the dense vegetation growing on the sea floor were suitably rewarded with one or two marks dependent on the clarity of their explanation.
- (g) This question was intended to test the candidates' appreciation of the writer's language and was worth two marks. One mark was gained by those who stated that the word *down* was repeated to emphasise the depth of the water; only a few candidates, however, gained the extra mark by revealing a more sophisticated response to the repetition and suggesting that it also served to add to the children's fascination or the sense of mystery/foreboding which is present in the passage.
- (h) The first part of this question was generally well answered although, as in **Question 1 (c)**, some candidates failed to confirm their understanding by stating merely that *the children's procession moved like snails* – to secure the mark it was necessary to add something like *moved as slowly as snails*. The second part of the question caused considerably more difficulty, with only a small number of candidates giving a clear explanation of the word *mutter* and stating that the sound of the waves on the roof was indistinct and low key.

- (i) Most candidates succeeded in identifying between four and seven details of what the children would have seen on their way to the beach and at the beach itself. Some expressed these details in a focused and concise way; others wrote at much greater length and included much irrelevance as well as the correct information. Although no penalty is imposed for such an approach, candidates who write at unnecessary length for this question are likely to penalise themselves by reducing the time they have available for **Question 2** and for checking through their answers at the end of the examination. The points that could have been included in response to this question were: *the sun (red and large); the cloudless sky; the (dirty grey) haze; the lane towards the sea; the (dry) spring; the water gush out; wildlife (bullocks, insects, basking lizards, ponies); (semi-circular) bay/sea/ocean; the reef; the sand/beach; the rocks; grass.*

Question 2

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, the general level of candidates' writing skills was of a satisfactory to good standard, with a pleasing number achieving marks in the top band for this aspect. The main limitations of those who scored less highly were mainly in the correct use of full stops to separate sentences, uncertain or non-existent paragraphing and imprecise use of vocabulary. Most candidates clearly understood the requirement to use their own words in answering this question, but a few responses were over-reliant on lifted sections from the source passage. As mentioned in previous reports, examiners have been consistently impressed by the improvement in candidates' linguistic skills over the years and there were very few examples, this year, of responses which failed to communicate as a result of inadequate written expression.

However, examiners were somewhat disappointed by the way many candidates responded to the reading requirements of this task. The question asked for a letter to be written to a friend assessing the merits of the island described in the passage and, in particular, to consider the good and bad aspects of the island, its weather and the children's experience at Exeter Rocks. Most responses dealt well with explaining the pros and cons of the island's weather and most made a sound attempt to write about the good and bad aspects of the island. In both cases, the best responses were those which took details from the passage and logically elaborated on them. For example, the fact that the children were travelling by ponies led some candidates to state with justification, that the island was lacking in some basic facilities; if they then went on to state that there was no Internet, no cell phone masts and so on, that was a perfectly acceptable approach even though such comments were anachronistic in relation to the time when the original text was written.

The least successful section of most responses, however, was in referring to the experience at Exeter Rocks. The final paragraph of the passage (which is also the longest) hints that something unusual was about to take place during the afternoon at the beach and, as no other questions had been set on this section of the passage, it was hoped that candidates would pick up on and develop these implications; in fact, many omitted this section entirely and of those who dealt with it, most played safe and did little more than retell the details included earlier in the passage. Although this is a directed writing task, candidates should be aware that, when bullet points are included in the question, the final one is usually there to provide an opportunity to develop the content from hints in the passage rather than just to paraphrase details as may be required by earlier bullet points.

In conclusion, candidates responded well to this paper. There was much positive in their responses and it is hoped that those taking this examination in future will continue to build on these good qualities and ensure that, as far as possible, they avoid the slips of concentration in reading questions which can so easily occur under the pressure of a timed examination.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/02

Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

This year there were some noticeable improvements in candidates' understanding of what each question required of them. For example, in **Question 1** fewer candidates repeated the content of the passage but adapted it to focus on the wording of the question. In **Question 3** there were fewer examples of commentaries instead of factual summaries, and the reading of both passages was in general more thorough. There were still some serious weaknesses in the answers to **Question 2** where candidates had not considered the main intentions and attitudes of the author towards Dr Zinc and his audience and how the wording of the descriptions communicated these ideas. Centres were advised to spend more time on ensuring that candidates understood the meanings of a wide range of vocabulary and the effects that words had on the reader.

Most candidates answered each question at an appropriate length, but there were some very long and tedious answers to **Question 2**. Of all the questions, this required quality and precision and not generalised, unanalytical comment.

Many of the scripts were well presented, but some of the handwriting was difficult to read. Examiners were instructed to mark unreadable scripts or to refer them to their Team Leaders, but Centres should realise that candidates tended to lose marks where their work could not be read fluently, simply because the logic of the answer could not be followed.

Several Centres submitted scripts on sheets of paper that were not fastened together. This made them very difficult to handle, since all scripts had to be checked more than once. In two cases, it was obvious that a whole sheet was missing, apparently lost at the Centre to the serious disadvantage of the candidate.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1

Passage: an account of a speech given by Dr Zinc. Your school or college has a group for older students, which debates matters of general interest and current affairs. Imagine that you are a member of this group and have been asked to attend Dr Zinc's talk in the public gardens. Write a report to the committee that organises the group. In your report give your reasons why Dr Zinc should be invited to speak at one of the debates. Use ideas and details from the passage to support your views.

In all examples of **Question 1** it is essential to prove to the Examiner that the passage has been read thoroughly and accurately. Hence candidates should use and create ideas that are relevant and connected to the passage and support them consistently with details that they have noticed and understood. There is no place for using quotations in answers to this question.

The least successful answers were those that retold the story of the passage in words that were very close to the original or which used quotations often of some length. Any reference to the reasons why Dr Zinc was to be invited were very brief and not of sufficient weight to be rewarded. Because there was no evaluation or interpretation, it was impossible to tell whether the passage had been understood. Hence the mark out of fifteen for reading was very low. The mark out of five for writing was similarly low because the style was heavily derivative.

Candidates who scored approximately half marks reproduced the content of the original mostly in their own words and added a paragraph at the end to indicate some reasons why Dr Zinc should or should not be invited. These reasons were valid but there was little or no development. For this type of answer a mark of between six and nine was generally given for reading, depending on the weight of the answer and its quality within the limitations described above.

Good answers were based on a number of reasons for and against, that were recognisably derived from the passage. They were explained with some thoroughness and were related to the needs of the debating group. However these candidates wrote in fairly abstract terms and did not obey the final instruction of the question, which was to include details from the passage to support their views. These candidates were rewarded for their focus, their analysis and their evaluation, and normally scored between ten and twelve for reading.

The best candidates introduced their report effectively and based it on a series of reasons backed up with appropriate details from the passage. Their answers were full and well balanced, scoring five marks for writing, and their reasoning was clear and firm.

Centres were reminded that in questions such as this, candidates were free to take either or both sides. Some answers presented arguments for and against Dr Zinc and only gave their decision in the last paragraph. However, Examiners expected reasonably sensible arguments and full and proper explanations.

There were many different styles of good answers. The framework given below indicates a type of response worthy of very high marks:

The Debating Society committee recently asked me to give a report on the activities of Dr Zinc and to recommend whether or not to invite him to speak at our school.

Briefly, I attended one of his meetings where he warned his audience of a series of disasters such as the ending of the world, the drying up of water supplies and nuclear wars. He had an unhealthy effect on his audience, who looked upon him as the only person who could save them and who behaved irrationally, believing that death was imminent.

You may wish to invite Dr Zinc because he could demonstrate several rhetorical skills and his powers of persuasion. For example he spoke very dramatically, saying 'terrible, oh terrible', and made highly effective pauses to gulp down water and to shed some tears.....

You might also wish him to repeat his preposterous message so that students could see through his illogical arguments. He had no evidence to back up his suggestions, for example that the world would end at a particular time of day.....

On the other hand, the rhetoric of his message is so powerful that it could have a dangerous effect on impressionable minds. Would our students yelp like mistreated pet dogs or would the atmosphere of our debating society degenerate into chaos, or ill-mannered and embarrassing laughter?

The doctor's appearance and demeanour would not be suitable for a school whose students pride themselves on their presentation. For example, he was revoltingly untidy about the hair....

Finally, the most frightening moment of the meeting was the appearance of some bully-boys intent on collecting as much money as possible. This suggests that the doctor was a fake and that his motive was purely financial. I can see that such an attitude could cause us, and him much trouble.

There were no common misconceptions, although there were many examples of ill-matching ideas and details from the text.

Question 2

Re-read the descriptions of (a) Dr Zinc in paragraph 1 and (b) his audience in paragraphs 5 and 6. Explain the effects the writer creates by using these descriptions. Support your answer by selecting words and phrases from these paragraphs.

Centres will have noticed the change in wording to this question, which was made in order to allow candidates to show links and to give overviews. For example, it encouraged them to decide that the writer's intention was to show that Zinc was a fake, nothing more than a rather bad actor whose main aim was to persuade his audience to give him money. Good candidates pointed to the writer's almost ridiculous exaggeration of the man. They explained how easily the audience could be taken in and how ridiculously and pathetically they behaved. Examiners gave credit for these accurate overviews since they were legitimately effects.

Other than this, the re-wording of the question had no other implications. The question was to be answered exactly as in previous sessions. Candidates were credited with choosing appropriate quotations, up to a mark of three out of ten; giving meanings or observing when a device such as an image was used, up to six marks; and explaining effects both of individual words and phrases and the use of devices, up to ten marks.

The weakest candidates gave many long quotations with no sense of focus on particular words. They made no useful comments but wrote general statements such as, 'The writer uses very descriptive language' or 'You feel as if you are really there'. Sometimes they attempted to explain a quotation by using the same key words.

Candidates in the middle range gave meanings, consistently for a mark of six, or less accurately for a mark of five or even four. The weaker candidates in this band were able to say what 'theatrically', 'bizarre', 'eccentric' and 'straggly' meant, but did not know 'cadaverous', and struggled over 'intoned' and 'melancholy expression'. They understood that their quotations needed to be of one or two words only.

The best candidates understood what effects were and explained the use of the words in more detail. For example, the various hints that Zinc was a man of the theatre, led them to suggest that his talk was untrue, a 'well-prepared soliloquy', and that he was therefore not to be trusted. The very best candidates cleverly pointed out that he 'wore a melancholy expression' that suggested theatrical costume.

Examiners looked for candidates who were prepared to take on this and other imagery. 'Throwing himself around like a tree in a gale' was studiously ignored by the weaker candidates. Some other gave very weak answers such as 'he was jumping around the stage'. The secret was to start from the image itself. If he was like a tree, he could not be jumping, but was static. The branches were his arms, perhaps long ones, and, as they waved about uncontrollably, they appeared to be subject to some exterior force, or at least his own madness.

Similarly, the image 'They moaned and sobbed like pet dogs left at home too long by their owners' was rarely seen from the starting point of the image. How could the audience be like pet dogs when they were humans? The answer could be only if they had lost their human natures and had become like defenceless animals, devoid of sense and totally dependent on their master – which is what Zinc had dangerously become.

Neither of these images really gave any difficulty, but many candidates had no idea of how to see them and make imaginative and logical connections.

The following example is above the standard of this examination, but it makes clear what sort of response the Examiners were looking for. The section about the audience illustrates how the new wording of the question could be used to score marks:

The writer's description of Dr Zinc in paragraph one makes the reader suppose that this is a gross exaggeration or that the man is no more than a bad actor.

Firstly we are told that he is 'gesticulating wildly'. The use of hands to emphasise words is one of a speaker's skills, but Zinc waves his arms about to no purpose, almost farcically. When we are told he is 'like a tree in a gale' we imagine him rooted to the spot, with arms like long branches at the mercy of some exterior force. Can this writer be serious?

Secondly he behaves 'in a theatrical manner'. Again he is not restrained, but delivers his ideas in an exaggerated way. Since theatre is not real, we imagine the man to be a fake. This is made more so by the fact that he 'wore a melancholy expression', in other words, his looks are assumed, (and his clothes borrowed). He 'intones' his message, which suggests the voice of a prophet (perhaps making a monotonous sound) or just a bad actor.

In case the reader is unsure, the writer tells us that Zinc is 'eccentric', out of the ordinary, 'bizarre', at the very least strange, and 'cadaverous', like a corpse, which fits his morbid message.

In paragraphs five and six, the reader cannot really take the description of the 'crowd' seriously. The woman who 'twitched uncontrollably' is either preposterous or horrific. There is nothing about Zinc that would make people behave in this exaggerated way. It is true that they might be so shocked as to be 'deathly pale', the word 'deathly' predicting their coming fate. But the simile of the 'pet dogs' reduces them to pathetic, weak animals making silly noises. When they 'lean towards him' it suggests mass hypnotism or a sort of comic Mexican wave. Finally they 'clasp their cell phones' as if the little machines were an icon of our civilisation, the last link with the real world which they have apparently deserted.

334 words (maximum a side and a half)

Finally, notice that this answer is not overlong. Some candidates thought that they could mislead the Examiner by writing two to three sides. This answer would take no more than a side and a half of typical handwriting. Examiners were prepared to give full marks for three examples in each section if the quality of explanation was high enough. Uncontrolled, inexact answers gained very few marks.

Part 2

Question 3

Passage: Doom and Gloom – an essay on the good aspects of modern life. Summarise (a) the encouraging aspects of life in the 21st century, according to the writer of Passage B and (b) the warnings about the future of the world as given by Dr Zinc in Passage A. Use your own words as far as possible.

This question was often well answered, although there were as usual, candidates who did not have the staying power to read Passage B methodically. However, the theme of the two passages was obviously of some interest, and a refreshing number of candidates scored full or nearly full marks for content. There were also some very concise answers, showing admirable judgement on what to miss out. An example was the fairly long explanation of medical advances (Passage B) that could have been summarised in a few words. There was no need to mention diabetes or cancer.

It was also good to see that some candidates had been taught to group points that were related and not merely to rely on going through the passage from beginning to end. This was superior work that was not required at this level, but which showed judgement and management of ideas that should be the aim of every candidate going on to advanced courses.

There were fewer examples of the common errors in writing summaries, but it is worth repeating the things that candidates sometimes did and should not have done. They:

- Wrote at too great a length. Candidates were required to write one side IN TOTAL;
- Wrote long introductions and end-pieces of a general and semi-relevant nature;
- Commented rather than summarised (this was meant to be informative writing);
- Provided extended explanations to individual points;
- Lost focus and inserted writing that did not refer to the passage;
- Gave quotations or copied phrases and sentences from the original.

All of these faults were reflected in low marks out of five for aspects of writing. However, a deduction in the content marks was made if the 'summary' was excessively long AND was ALSO mostly or completely copied from the passages. This deduction was applied in some rare cases.

The following example would easily score full marks. Centres should remember that, as usual, there were several more points in the mark scheme than were required for the full fifteen marks for content.

The writer of the second passage states that one of the encouraging aspects of life in the 21st century is that humans are using their brains to solve many problems. An example of this is in the field of medical science. Our new age has also introduced cheap and rapid transport, leading to the sharing of cultures. Computers have provided instant communication and have promoted knowledge and commerce, while television has made international sport and concerts available to audiences the world over. In politics, rich governments are beginning to realise their duties to the rest of the world and are addressing matters of poverty and the environment

Dr Zinc's warnings are, in contrast, entirely pessimistic. He speaks of death on earth through the spread of disease and through drought. Worst of all is the likelihood of devastation caused by nuclear war. He predicts our destruction by an asteroid and the burning up of the planet by the sun. The weather will produce natural disasters and the earth will end in a loud explosion. Mankind will continue to do evil, torturing animals in the name of science, poisoning minds through the media and allowing dastardly criminals to do their worst.

199 words

Centres will notice that this example would take less than one side of normal handwriting.

There were very few examples of misunderstanding, but one common error was that many candidates thought that the sun would explode and destroy the earth.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/03

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

Examiners agreed that the standard of writing was higher this year. There were fewer examples of candidates who failed to use the material effectively in **Question 1**, although there was a weakness in adopting an appropriate tone for the letter. In the composition section, most of the candidates who wrote descriptions avoided narrative, wisely choosing a small number of events or moments to give their writing some shape. The stories varied in their effectiveness. Some candidates did not involve themselves as narrators and, as a result, the work read more like a newspaper report and had little to interest the reader. The essays set as **Question 2** produced the weakest responses. While some were excellent, many had few arguments and quickly repeated themselves or failed to achieve clarity.

Some candidates were defeated by their first language interference, more so in Section Two.

The commonest and most serious errors were as follows:

- ❑ inconsistent paragraphing, most commonly very long paragraphs spanning more than one stage in the writing;
- ❑ inconsistent tenses, especially when starting in the present and moving backwards and forwards into the past;
- ❑ poor use of full stops, especially where candidates wrote strings of short sentences separated by commas;
- ❑ non-existent commas where the sense was affected, particularly between clauses;
- ❑ sentences without finite verbs, more commonly in the descriptions;
- ❑ in spelling, the running together of words that should be separate, such as 'atleast' and the opposite, such as 'now a days'.

Comments on specific questions

Section One: Directed Writing

Question 1

You are the owner of a new attraction called 'Our Country – A Living History Experience'. You have produced an information sheet, which you are going to send to a local school. However, you have seen the *School Trips and Visits policy* printed below, and know that the Head-teacher will think carefully before allowing students on a visit. Write a letter to the Head-teacher to promote your business and persuade him/her that you can offer an educational and interesting day out for a group of students.

Candidates were specifically directed to the information sheet and the school policy document as the basis for their answers. This exercise was less imaginative than **Question 1** in Paper 2, and required candidates to select and manage a great deal of content, some of which would not strictly have been necessary to persuade the Head-teacher.

The least good candidates dismissed the schools policy by saying that it had been read and that all the conditions had been met. Some, however, did not mention it at all. The rest of the answer consisted of selections of sentences and phrases from the material that were very close to what had originally been written. The individual items from the policy were only considered by implication. These candidates scored no more than five for reading.

Candidates scoring six marks for reading made clear references to most of the points in the policy and illustrated them simply from the information sheet. These references were undeveloped. Most of the candidates in this category dealt adequately with the direct link to the subjects studied and made at least one reference to the academic activities and the costs. Their comments on the traditional classroom setting and the facilities for staff development were often almost too slight to be credited. There was some difficulty for some candidates in understanding health and safety policies, but candidates ought to have been able to pick up the reference to the tools.

The best answers were those that entered fully into the task, understanding the needs of the school and promoting the attraction with confidence. These candidates developed the individual ideas to fit the items in the policy without a mechanical point-by-point approach. They used their own words, and, where they added points of their own, made sure that they were true to the original. Many of these candidates re-ordered textual details to make their letters clear and to avoid repetition. This was particularly true of the *academic activities* section. The best of the letters sounded true to life and integrated the material with purpose and audience.

Only ten marks were for reading. For writing there were fifteen marks, and many candidates wrote well-structured, accurate letters. They tended to use a consistently formal tone, appropriate to the recipient of the letter. Some candidates wrote informally, which was not normally suitable. Most letters were not consistently persuasive. Candidates used a number of persuasive words such as 'wonderful' and 'exciting', scattered throughout, and the last paragraph usually contained one or two sentences of encouragement. The features of the attraction were not often sufficiently highlighted. The way into this was by the point about 'information or experience which could not be gained in a traditional classroom setting', and some candidates did make something of details such as the costumes, the old English accents and the traditional foods and toys.

Section Two: Composition

General comments

The advice given about length is worth considering. It is, of course, not compulsory to write between 350 and 450 words, but candidates should remember that they could score full marks by writing within these limits. Two sides of typical handwriting is a good guide. Some candidates writing a description wrote less, and the quality was good enough to score high marks. Others were carried away by their narratives, and spent their time on quantity at the expense of quality. These long stories were often merely trains of events and they tended to become linguistically careless as time ran out.

It was important to plan before writing, and some candidates did not plan well. Despite a few notes about the content of their essays (**Question 2**) they still ran out of varied arguments before the end. A properly attempted plan would have warned them not to proceed had they not been able to think of what to argue. Narratives needed a clear understanding of what the climax is to be and how the reader is to be prepared for it, yet this remained nearly always the weakest part of the story.

Comments on specific questions

Question 2 (a): 'Teachers shouldn't try to be friends or role models.' What are your views?

Candidates rarely thought about the differences between friends and role models and often wrote about them unsuccessfully as one. Those who understood what a role model might be distanced themselves from celebrities and explained the importance of the example teachers set *in loco parentis*. They were experts in their subjects and kindly disciplinarians. From this point they were able to argue the importance of firm friendliness to all students, understanding their needs. Weaker candidates always started from the advantages and disadvantages of teachers posing as friends. On the one hand they might encourage students, on the other practise favouritism. The structure of their work was often weak, starting with some reasonable argument, but soon running out of material with frequent repetition. To gain high marks for style and accuracy, candidates needed a wide vocabulary, but had to be careful not to use too many complex words, since that tended to over-complicate the meaning.

Question 2(b): 'All people have the right to their own opinions but not the right to force them upon others.' Do you agree?

This topic proved more difficult than the other since it was largely abstract. Some good candidates argued it extremely well, choosing their language carefully and not allowing their arguments to become convoluted. One problem was that it was quite difficult to argue that some opinions had to be forced on other people, although many candidates were not secure in what they understood as an opinion rather than, for example, a law. Some candidates showed how the sharing of opinions was a way forward, while others showed how serious quarrels arose from forcing opinions on others. Good candidates progressed from the personal to the family or small organisation to religion and politics. Comments about Hitler were often quite well managed. Some candidates had these things to say but what they wrote was a poorly planned muddle of ideas, inconsistently developed. There were many examples of poorly sequenced arguments, and many candidates changed direction obviously in the middle of a paragraph. Weak candidates had very little to say and often started with an ineffective introduction, wrote one good paragraph, and thereafter repeated parts of what they had already written. This topic, more than any other, required a plan.

Question 3(a): 'The happy couple'. Paying particular attention to the sights and sounds, describe the scene as two people enjoy a special meal in a restaurant.

This was the most popular of all the topics. Most of the descriptions followed the same formula, although that did not really matter since it was the quality of the detail and the language that attracted the reader's attention. The vast majority started with the setting, often with a view over the bay with moonlight. Other writers might start with the interior of the restaurant, and here there was more originality. There was then a description of the couple and the waiter (almost always male). Some attention was paid to the food itself – often the men had steak while the women preferred salmon. There was some music and then the man produced a little box from his pocket, the woman said yes and there was general applause. Some of the couples were observed from the writer's table, some were elderly, and one man was infinitely more sophisticated than his partner. One candidate contrasted the poverty outside the restaurant with the opulence inside. On the whole, this topic was handled well since there was the opportunity for a wide range of descriptive language and the setting of an overall atmosphere. The series of events truly constituted a description rather than a narrative, because of the single setting and the reduced timescale.

Question 3(b): Describe a place of refuge or a safe retreat.

Some examiners reported that they had seen few examples of this topic, but it was by no means unpopular. Many of the places were refugee camps, and there was a tendency to describe the refugees rather than the camp itself. There were a large number of bedrooms, places in the country or by the water, and places including trees. Some candidates described fantasy worlds. Some candidates described places of escape from disturbing people and experiences. The best answers were very clearly those that were made to sound real. This was done by the choice of detail and the language to describe it. Some candidates wrote structured responses but with a series of clichés as detail. These places could have been anywhere, and were derived from a generally romantic view of nature for the most part. As such they did not constitute good writing because there was nothing to grab the reader's attention, which must be the first aim.

Question 4(a): Write a story or an episode of suspense in which a character is facing a problem relating to time running out.

Some of the most nail-biting writing was about being in an examination room. Candidates explored their own feelings of panic and inaction when confronted by an examination paper that seemed beyond them. What was good was the 'stop-start' nature of the writing as the time ran out. Tension was provided by the voice of the person in charge, and there were devices such as the pen that ran out and the question over the page that the candidate had not noticed. The examination had its own structure, while other ways of tackling the topic did not always work. The commonest was defusing a bomb. This story was often spoiled by too much dialogue, which had little function. There were also too many events, such as racing round from location to location in a mad whirl. This meant that by the time the climax was reached the writer had no energy left, so the climax fell apart. One had little sympathy for the expert who was advised by the bomber to cut the red wire and did not believe him. Many of the plots were not well thought out. There were many people late for meetings (a common theme over the years), some over-detailed sporting events, and some re-runs of last winter's short cuts, which tended to forget the time element.

Question 4(b): 'Who's who?' Write a story in which a case of mistaken identity plays a central part.

The weakest feature of the handling of this topic was that the stories were over complicated. What is more important is the revelation of feeling. How would one really feel if one were mistaken for someone else with a joyous or hideous outcome? These feelings were largely sacrificed to long series of events, particularly concerning gangs and the drug trade. Not many candidates considered taking a comparatively simple event and making it into the sort of narrative that could be managed in such a short space. Long series of narratives often meant that the narrator was more like a newspaper reporter, and the story was devoid of telling description and feeling. It was almost more likely that the narration would be improbable without those details that make a reader believe in it. There was a good deal of pointless dialogue and some very long and undisciplined writing.

Final comments

Despite the criticisms given above, there were many examples of really good writing in each category. If this had been a competition, there would have been many finalists and no doubt a worthy winner. The best writing was that which drew in the reader with its illusion of reality and its superior and inviting range of language. The best writing was always fluent with an understanding of how different types of sentence work.

All the topics give much opportunity for classroom discussion before being attempted.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

In this session it was extremely rare to find assignments that did not meet the requirements of the syllabus. The majority of centres had chosen an ample variety of writing purposes and styles, which is pleasing. An example portfolio might include informative writing, followed by a story to make the reader imagine events, character and places, and a persuasive or analytical final piece.

However, not all centres had thought through the purpose of their portfolio work, which is to give opportunities to candidates to enjoy writing and to develop their skills so that they become better writers. Too often candidates were made to write essays about topics that they had not experienced, and to write in styles that were too formal to be accessible to them.

The best centres were those that encouraged candidates to write from their own thoughts and experiences. Many of the formal styles did not sound original and were wrongly derived from material found on websites. Centres are reminded that they must be able to vouch for the originality of the writing and that it is against the principles of coursework to copy or closely paraphrase whole phrases and sentences.

Moderators made the following points about acceptable and unacceptable practice:

The traditional 'research essay' is not appropriate. There is no assessment for reading apart from the third assignment and no reason why candidates should research material for what is rarely an English essay.

Candidates are not encouraged to write in impersonal styles. The function of this portfolio is to encourage candidates to speak from their own thoughts and from the heart.

There is no need for any research for the third assignment. The only material to be used should be the chosen source article.

Centres should try to avoid using the same topics from year to year.

On the other hand, moderators were quite satisfied with centres that encouraged candidates to argue in the first person and to write well-structured speeches *for* and *against* topics.

Assessments were generally accurate. Where centres over or under marked, it was usually a matter of accuracy and language use. One of the strengths of good candidates was their ability to use a wide range of vocabulary, and this was not always credited enough. On the other hand, many candidates wrote short, simple sentences while better writers used complex sentences in a variety of patterns. This difference in language use was not always noted.

Many assignments contained numerous errors which should have been identified before the final version was completed. Some of these were not noted by the teachers who were assessing the work. One of the commonest errors was the use of commas between sentences.

The other common reason for adjusting a centre's marks was the reading mark in the third assignment. Reasons for this are given below.

Comments on specific aspects of the coursework

The early draft

There was a wide range of practice. Some drafts were virtually the same as the final version. Some had been changed, but there was little annotation to suggest why this was happening. Some centres made notes on the early draft, and that was instructive to moderators.

The early draft provides the opportunity for the candidate to revise, edit and correct. The best drafts contained the following:

- notes by the teacher suggesting general improvements to the candidate (e.g. starting a dialogue)
- revisions, edits and corrections by the candidate (in another colour) responding to the teacher.

At no time should the teacher correct the work; that is not permitted and it is the job of the candidate.

In this way, the draft becomes a valuable stage in producing the finished piece of work. Early drafts that appear to be beyond improvement are not useful and, in some cases, lead moderators to doubt the originality of the work.

The first assignment

Many of the moderators' comments appear above. What moderators criticised was the 'essay style' piece on a topic about which the candidate had no knowledge to speak for himself or herself. Recourse was to the Internet from which various chunks of material were downloaded and then copied or slightly paraphrased. Some of the topics were repeated from several previous sessions and rarely had any new points to make: teachers are encouraged to develop new and refreshing topics for their candidates.

In addition to this, sometimes the style was generally impersonal and suspiciously at odds with the style of the other two assignments. There were often fewer errors in the first assignment than in the others, and sometimes it was obvious that the candidate's ability to write stylistically could not have produced anything like the language of the first piece. A final point was that this first piece was sometimes under-marked by teachers, who were perhaps aware that the writing was not entirely original.

This problem almost always disappeared when the writing was in a different form from the essay. Centres proved very good at teaching candidates to write reasonably rhetorical speeches. These were often well structured and sounded personal. If the content was not completely original, at least it had been adapted.

However, the most satisfactory way of dealing with the problem was to rethink the assignment. Obviously there is nothing wrong with an essay style if the candidate is affected by it. A piece about bullfighting, for example, is more likely to be effective if the writer has actually experienced a bullfight.

Other centres chose different approaches which might be better paths to travel. Moderators remind centres that the styles and purposes of the first two pieces should be different.

The following topics inspired good writing, no doubt after sound advice and preparation by the candidates' teachers.

A visit to Benidorm; The unforgettable day; Moving to Spain; Going to India; The Duke of Edinburgh's award diary; Hike to Low Peak; Class trip to Ypres; Changing Schools; The Odwira festival; Sport in our School; Letter about Jeddah; Classroom design; Pig farming; A pirate's life for me; My thoughts after reading Lord of the Rings; a tourist brochure.

The second assignment

The vast majority of second assignment pieces were fictional. It was clear that many centres had taken previous advice and prepared the ground by studying the nature and structures of short stories. Many candidates had read mystery stories as preparation for their own. One centre successfully studied style and characterisation in Raymond Chandler's works. Some centres invented their own titles such as *The Casurina Tree*, and inspired candidates to work their imagination around them.

There were many intriguing titles such as *Do not play with fire*, *Guirola's curse* and *Betrayal*. Other stories were based on the themes of thunder, a mirror and a desert cactus. These titles suggest the importance of originality and personal thought and imagination.

There were some very successful descriptions. In Paper 0500/03 the standard of descriptive writing has improved greatly during the last few sessions. Descriptions do not need to be static; candidates can write from different angles and there can be limited events to allow the descriptions to progress. This ensures that the writer does not run out of things to say.

The moderators read some excellent descriptions, for example, of a church, a hospital and even an examination hall. One candidate wrote about a Thai market, there was a description of a dance and of a city by night. Centres that usually do fiction might like to consider experimenting with descriptive assignments.

The third assignment

For the third assignment, the best articles to choose are those that are lively and have ideas and arguments that are controversial. For example, two centres chose articles about the late Steve Irwin, the crocodile hunter, whose life was dangerous and colourful. Hence the accounts of his death showed him to be controversial and hugely popular. Candidates found it easy to engage with these ideas, explore them and discuss the issues that arose from his conduct.

Centres are advised to avoid informative articles that just give advice and are often written in uninspiring language. Such articles give little scope for the candidate to interact, enabling them only to repeat the information and thereby gain very few marks for reading.

On the whole, centres that chose articles for the candidates had better results than those that allowed candidates to do the choosing. Too many candidates, left to their own devices, chose inappropriately.

Some articles that contained enough to react to included: an advertisement for Bio oil, youth employment in the Falkland Islands, anniversary celebrations in Ghana, *'A Bushfull of lies'*, designer babies, electronic tags for criminals, bullying by email, problems with polar bears, a Madonna adoption article, and dress codes.

The best tasks again involved a response to the writer, the publisher, or a character named in the article. In other words, the writer said certain things that the candidate thought should be challenged or developed into a further argument. The best responses took the ideas and opinions and tangled with them. They were most commonly worth nine or ten marks. Some candidates wrote analyses of the way in which the ideas in the articles were put forward. These were less inspiring pieces but equally valid in terms of the mark scheme.

Many responses identified ideas from the article but did not proceed with them. Some used the ideas mechanically without original thought. These responses showed varying degrees of understanding but were mostly worth five or six marks. Such candidates were often over marked.

Finally, some candidates mistakenly took the article as a stimulus for their own writing and did not use the ideas to prove their reading skills. Here there was very little connection with the article, and the mark could not be higher than three.

In many cases, however, this exercise produced the best writing in the portfolio. Voices were strong and personal and candidates had real arguments to make, and therefore found the words. There was sometimes a real sense of persuasion. Many candidates had the chance to show what they could do and to express their own personality through their writing.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

General comments

Moderators report that the tests are now well-established, with the majority of examiners managing the new format competently and with a good deal of confidence.

Administrative requirements have been adhered to very well. Moderators have no issues to raise in relation to procedural matters.

Comments on specific aspects of the test

Part 1: Individual task

Moderators reported that the topics chosen still tend to be of two main types: 1) the personal, perhaps anecdotal or autobiographical piece, and 2) the informative, fact-based presentation. The syllabus does allow a variety of approaches such as monologues, dramatic performances and role-playing media/news/documentary reports, but these are uncommon.

Some of the interesting topics chosen this session were:

Forgiveness	Being the daughter of a diplomat
Living as a foreigner in Poland	Fear
The changing culture of Jordan	Teenage parties
Rap music: its downfalls	The veil
A study of life and death	Mascots
The universal treatment of women	Near-death experiences
Chinese calligraphy	True love
Chocolate	The consequences of divorce
The effects of technology on the young	Who exactly are the terrorists?
The situation in Sudan	The importance of first impressions.

The choice of topic naturally impacts on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or a rather mundane topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out to explore, to challenge, to be creative, is likely to attract the attention of the listener, and productive discussion will probably result. Moderators would like see a wider range of alternative styles of presentation.

Candidates are reminded that they should not present speeches; cue cards are allowed but reading from a script is not. There is a feeling among moderators that more candidates are relying on their scripts, and that they should instead adopt a more spontaneous and lively approach to talking about their topics. Those candidates who utilise visual or other props tend to perform better in these tests.

Part 2: Discussion

It was very pleasing to hear evidence that the majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination. Moderators are happy that, in almost all cases, examiners were very much part of the discussions, and the discussions were generally productive extensions of the Individual task. It was clear that many candidates had anticipated examiners' responses and planned for focused discussion.

There is growing evidence that examiners are enjoying their roles in the discussion and sharing their views and opinions more. Moderators welcome this, as it often leads to fruitful conversation.

Assessment

For Part 1, centres are reminded that for Band 1 “lively delivery sustaining audience interest” is necessary, and “a wide range of language devices” should be present. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian, informative talk, although secure and safe, is likely to satisfy the criteria for Band 3. For higher reward, the candidate needs to be attempting something more challenging, more creative, more ambitious. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For Part 2, we are also assessing listening skills, using an independent set of descriptors. The essence of a good listener is that he/she will choose the right moment to respond and respond accurately and in some depth, hopefully adding to the conversation. If a candidate responds to most of the examiner’s prompts soundly, this is likely to result in a Band 2 mark (7-8). For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward. This involves the integration of speaking and listening skills.

Moderators noted greater leniency in awarding high marks for Part 1, but more accuracy in the marking of Part 2.

Requests of centres

- Moderators would like to receive an additional document from centres; a list of the topics that candidates have chosen for Part 1. This should be sent in with the sample tape(s) and other documentation.
- If literary content is used it must be adapted. It is not acceptable to recite literature and then have a discussion about the literary extract. However, candidates may like to write their own poems or other literary pieces, and read these out in Part 1.
- Please inform candidates that reading from a script (delivering a speech) is unlikely to result in Band 1 marks being awarded for Part 1.

Final comments

Moderators enjoyed listening to samples and recognise the amount of effort made at many centres by candidates and teachers in presenting interesting and appropriate work.

Centres are again invited to be more creative and ambitious in the choice of topics in Part 1. Perhaps a way forward is for candidates to attempt to deploy a wider range of presentational devices; this may help broaden the types of presentation given.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/06

Speaking and Listening Coursework

General comments

Moderators report that most centres are completing appropriate coursework tasks. Indeed, in some cases, the tasks are very interesting and result in stimulating speaking and listening activities which the candidates clearly enjoy. At such centres, candidates and teachers are working together to design and implement a wide range of tasks which illustrate speaking and listening skills.

If teachers feel that they cannot conduct **three different tasks** in accordance with the syllabus requirements, they are advised to enter candidates for the 0500 05 Speaking/Listening test.

Comments on specific aspects

Procedures were generally followed well. Centres who offered additional annotation (written on the Candidate Record Cards) accompanying each task undertaken by the candidate, helped to make the process of external moderation swift and efficient.

Assessment was applied by most centres with a good deal of accuracy. There was occasional leniency.

Advice to centres

A moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a centre's coursework: initially to confirm the centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that appropriate tasks have been completed.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, centres need only submit **recordings of the Task 2 activity**. It is not necessary to send in recordings of group activities or talks/speeches from individual candidates.