

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/11

Reading Passage (Core)

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading, although there were 10 marks available for writing in **Question 2**.

Below is advice for responding to **Question 1** which can be applied in future sessions:

- In responding to questions allocated one mark, it is likely that only a straightforward answer is required.
- In responding to questions allocated two marks, it is often necessary to identify two discrete points.
- For the 6 mark language question where candidates are asked to explain what the writer means by three phrases identified from the passage, candidates should explain two elements for each sub-section (see **Question 1(g)** below).
- For the 6 mark language question where candidates are asked to select three of their own phrases and then to explain the effect of these phrases, candidates need to carefully choose independent phrases for which they can attach different explanations (see **Question 1(h)** below).
- In responding to the 7 mark summary question, candidates need to identify specific details, bearing in mind that each correct point will be awarded 1 mark (see **Question 1(i)** below).
- Candidates should answer in their own words if this is specified in the question.

In responding to **Question 2** in the future, candidates should ensure that they:

- cover all aspects of the question, including the requirements detailed in the bullet points
- select relevant, convincing details from the passage which they interpret in their own words
- develop their response using relevant hints from the passage
- write in the appropriate genre and register, and use carefully selected vocabulary
- demonstrate use of a variety of sentence structures
- write with accuracy and clarity.

Overall, it is recommended that candidates carefully read the precise requirements of the question and the specific section of the passage.

General comments

The paper proved to be both accessible and interesting, and most candidates responded well to the imaginative opportunities offered by the writing task. Overall, performance was good, with many candidates producing responses of a high standard. There was no evidence that responses suffered from the time constraints imposed by an examination and the new format of the question paper was helpful in encouraging candidates to focus clearly in their responses, particularly to the summary **Question 1 (i)**. There were many thorough and perceptive responses to the reading tasks in **Question 1**, indicating that candidates had taken care to read the questions carefully and to consider more than just the surface implications of those questions which carried more than one mark. With **Questions** such as **1 (a)** and **1 (b)**, to gain the 2 marks available, it is necessary for candidates to identify two discrete and relevant points in their answers. This comment is particularly apposite to answering the summary question which is marked on a mark per point basis: careful reading of the precise requirements of the question and clear focus on the specific section of the passage in which the points are contained will enable candidates to score highly on this important question.

Nearly all candidates produced responses of adequate length to the directed writing task and most observed the instruction to write in the format of a letter to a sister. The most successful responses picked up on the descriptions in the original passage and developed them into an effective account of the atmosphere in the lighthouse, supplemented by a convincing indication of the writer's developing state of mind and paid full attention to the third bullet which required an imaginative interpretation of how the episode described may

have developed. As has been the case in previous sessions, the overall competence of written expression was of a good standard. Although there was evidence of insecure punctuation, spelling and use of idiom, by far the majority of scripts communicated their ideas clearly and without causing the reader to pause and re-read in order to understand what was being said. Most responses to the writing task were paragraphed, organised, of adequate length and written in an appropriate register. The most successful responses used carefully chosen vocabulary which effectively conveyed the atmosphere in the lighthouse during and after the appearance of the sea creature. In the majority of cases, the response to the writing task was the strongest area of performance. It should also be noted that there were less cases of difficulty of reading the handwriting of responses; this improvement may well have been due to the change in format of the question paper and was especially gratifying as this paper was marked on screen for the first time – it was only seldom that the magnifying tool had to be used to discern the spelling of a particular word.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As stated above, nearly all candidates displayed a secure general understanding of the passage and this was reflected in their answers to the individual questions. The questions that proved the most demanding, and, therefore, those that proved to be the most effective discriminators, were those that tested appreciation and understanding of the vocabulary contained in the passage.

- (a) Most responses identified that one of the ways in which the lighthouse keepers felt like birds in the sky was because they were very high up and could, therefore see for great distances; this statement alone was worth one of the two marks available. The second mark for this question was awarded to those who also saw that the comparison suggested a feeling of independence, resulting from their being surrounded by space and/or far from land.
- (b) This question required a more imaginative interpretation and there were some responses which gained both of the available marks. There were, in fact, three distinct points that could have been made (each worth one mark of the two available); these were: seagulls are found in flocks/there are frequently very many of them all together; when disturbed, the birds scatter at random in many different directions as would the individual cards in a pack when dropped from a great height; seagulls are white with flecks of different colour and therefore bear some resemblance to the surface of playing cards. All three of these points were identified by candidates although not all of them succeeded in mentioning two of them in their answer.
- (c) Again, most candidates showed a general understanding of McDunn's comments about the mysteries of the sea, and the most successful expressed the gist of it succinctly in their own words. There were up to three specific details about the mysteries of the sea which could be identified for the award of two marks (one mark per detail): these were: Man has not yet fully explored the deep seas; the deep sea is a magical/terrifying/mysterious place; it is a world that is extremely (300,000 years) old.
- (d) This was a straightforward question that could be answered by lifting the appropriate phrase from the passage, explaining that McDunn switched off the room lights so that they would not reflect on the glass and would, therefore, allow the two men to see the surface of the sea clearly. Most responses identified this point and successfully gained the one mark available. Many of those who did not answer this question successfully needed to find a less esoteric reason for McDunn's action. Again, it is important to emphasise to future candidates that questions carrying a tariff of only one mark are very likely to require a perfectly straightforward answer.
- (e) This was another two mark question so, again, it was necessary to identify two distinct reasons for the writer's use of a single sentence paragraph. Most responses successfully stated that one reason for its use was to emphasise the suddenness of the sound as it interrupted the silence; a further mark could have been gained by elaborating on the dramatic effect of this or by explaining that the sound signalled a further, important stage in the story.
- (f) As with **Question 1 (c)** the award of full marks for this question depended on the ability to identify clearly, in the candidate's own words, the main details of McDunn's comments. These were: the creature and the world below the sea from which it came have remained unchanged for millions of years; during this time, life on the surface of the earth has evolved; therefore, from the creature's point of view the life on the earth's surface is impossible. Not only did many candidates show a

partial understanding of this point but also a large number expressed their understanding with sufficient clarity to gain both available marks.

- (g) This question required candidates to explain the meaning of three phrases; two marks were available for each explanation and this was one of the questions that proved to be an effective discriminator. Questions of this type follow the standard procedure mentioned earlier; there are two marks available for each sub-section of the question. Therefore, in each sub-section there are two elements that need to be explained in the candidate's own words. Although many candidates showed that they had a secure general understanding of the selected phrases only a few succeeded in explaining this precisely enough to gain the full six marks available. In the phrase *bumbling in the high throat of the tower* the key words requiring explanation were *bumbling* and *high throat of the tower* so a statement such as *this means that there was a rumbling sound coming from the upper part of the lighthouse* would qualify for the award of both marks. It is also worth recording that some candidates correctly identified the use of personification in this phrase, although this is not a requirement of this question. Similarly, in the phrase *studying the murk and fog* a complete answer would need to state that the men were *looking closely* at the *dim, misty darkness* and a correct explanation of *drip up from the subterranean* would need to show that the candidate had understood that the creature was *dropping water* as it slowly moved up from *deep below the surface*. Some candidates successfully explained the apparently more difficult element of a phrase, such as *studying*, but then reduced the quality of their answer by simply lifting the phrase *murk and fog* rather than trying to explain it.
- (h) The approach required for successfully answering this question was similar to that for **Question 1 (g)**. There were many words and phrases in the given section of the passage which a candidate could have chosen to show how the writer's language conveys an atmosphere of loneliness and mystery. Each appropriate phrase selected was rewarded with one mark; the remaining three marks available were awarded for an explanation of how each phrase added to the specified effect. The key to gaining full marks for this question lies in candidates ensuring that they choose phrases that are sufficiently independent of each other so that they do not simply repeat the same explanation for each phrase as it will not be rewarded more than once; a fully successful response, therefore, is dependent on evidence that the candidate has responded to the implications and associations in the vocabulary used by the writer. For example, identification of the phrase *the long grey lawn of the sea* would gain one mark; an explanation that stated that *the sea was made to appear as smooth, empty and unnaturally colourless*, would qualify for the award of a second mark.
- (i) This question required candidates to summarise McDunn's thoughts and feelings about the sea monster and the appearance of the creature itself from paragraph 4 until the end of the passage. As mentioned earlier in this report, it is marked on a mark per point basis and, therefore, requires a close focus on the specific requirements of the task and the precise section of the passage. Although most responses showed a general understanding of McDunn's thoughts and feelings, many needed to identify specific details of the creature's appearance to achieve a substantial number of marks. The points that could have been made were:

McDunn was:

- (1) nervous/excited
- (2) anticipating something special
- (3) afraid Johnny might think he was mad

The creature:

- (4) had a large head
- (5) was dark in colour
- (6) had huge eyes
- (7) had a very long/slender/beautiful neck
- (8) had a body covered in coral/shells/crayfish/like an island
- (9) had a (long) tail
- (10) was (at least) 25 metres in length
- (11) had been unchanged for millions of/10 million years.

Question 2

This question required candidates to take on the persona of Johnny, the younger lighthouse keeper, and to write a letter to his sister describing the events of the night. Nearly all candidates understood the main requirements of the task and wrote in an appropriate genre and register, although a few wrote as if they were McDunn; however, as long as they followed the remaining instructions in the question rubric, no specific penalty was applied in the marking for this misunderstanding. As mentioned earlier in this report, the overall standard of responses was of an at least satisfactory quality. Many achieved the top two mark bands for both Reading and Writing. Overall, candidates appreciated the details of the atmosphere of anticipation and tension which was implied in the passage and many elaborated imaginatively on these features, reinforcing the sense of apprehension through thoughtfully detailed comments about Johnny's state of mind and, in particular, about the way in which he reacted to McDunn's nervous demeanour. Less successful responses acknowledged these details but they needed to add details of their own imagining rather than paraphrasing what was in the original passage. The least successful responses tended to simply lift relevant details or sections of the original but needed to put these into their own words.

Most candidates made some attempt to address the final bullet. It was in the convincing detail with which they developed on the hints given in the passage where the discrimination in quality of response arose. The most successful eschewed cataclysmic conclusions and concentrated on describing an ending to the night in which some explanation was given for the lighthouse's attraction for the creature: for example, the creature was attracted by the Fog Horn and joined in some eerie duet with it before returning to the deeps. Less successful responses tended either to develop into not particularly convincing man versus monster battles or ended anticlimactically with the monster inexplicably submerging and McDunn and Johnny settling down to a quiet cup of tea. The few least successful responses needed to respond to this bullet. Nearly all responses at all levels remembered to sign off the letter and focused their ending on reminding the sister of the experience the writer had undergone.

Overall, the standard of candidates' written expression was at best, very good indeed and at least, satisfactory. As previously mentioned, a good number of responses showed sufficient linguistic competence to write in an appropriate tone and to choose vocabulary aimed effectively at bringing the situation alive. Technically, these scripts showed a variety of sentence structures and were secure in spelling and punctuation. Indeed, most candidates communicated their ideas with some clarity although errors of sentence separation and uncertain spelling of straightforward vocabulary prevented many from achieving marks in the highest bands for writing.

In conclusion, the overall performance of candidates in this examination was of a sound standard and Centres should be congratulated both for the qualities shown in the answers produced and also for the obvious commitment to and interest in their work displayed by their candidates.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/12
Reading Passage (Core)

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading, although there were 10 marks available for writing in **Question 2**.

Below is advice for responding to **Question 1** which can be applied in future sessions:

- In responding to questions allocated one mark, it is likely that only a straightforward answer is required.
- In responding to questions allocated two marks, it is often necessary to identify two discrete points.
- For the 6 mark language question where candidates are asked to explain what the writer means by three phrases identified from the passage, candidates should explain two elements for each sub-section (see **Question 1 (h)** below).
- For the 6 mark language question where candidates are asked to select three of their own phrases and then to explain the effect of these phrases, candidates need to carefully choose independent phrases for which they can attach different explanations (see **Question 1(d)** below).
- In responding to the 7 mark summary question, candidates need to identify specific details, bearing in mind that each correct point will be awarded 1 mark (see **Question 1(f)** below).
- Candidates should answer in their own words if this is specified in the question.

In responding to **Question 2** in the future, candidates should ensure that they:

- cover all aspects of the question, including the requirements detailed in the bullet points
- select relevant, convincing details from the passage which they interpret in their own words
- develop their response using relevant hints from the passage
- write in the appropriate genre and register, and use carefully selected vocabulary
- demonstrate use of a variety of sentence structures
- write with accuracy and clarity.

Overall, it is recommended that candidates carefully read the precise requirements of the question and the specific section of the passage.

General comments

The paper proved to be both accessible and interesting, and most candidates responded well to the imaginative opportunities offered by the writing task. Overall, the standard of performance was good, with many candidates producing responses of a high standard. There was no evidence that candidates' work suffered from the time constraints imposed by an examination and the new format of the question paper was helpful in encouraging candidates to focus clearly in their responses to the summary **Question 1 (f)**. There were many thorough and perceptive responses to the reading tasks in **Question 1** indicating that candidates had taken care to read the questions carefully and to consider more than just the surface implications of those questions which carried more than one mark. This is a key point for all future candidates for this paper to keep in mind – with questions such as **Question 1 (a)** and **(b)** to gain the 2 marks available, it is necessary for responses to identify two discrete and relevant points in their answers. This comment is particularly apposite to answering the summary question which is marked on a mark per point basis: careful reading of the precise requirements of the question and clear focus on the specific section of the passage in which the points are contained will enable candidates to score highly on this important question.

Nearly all candidates produced responses of adequate length to the directed writing task and most observed the instruction to write in the format of a report to the manager of the company Time Safari.

The most successful responses showed a clear awareness of the dangers inherent in travelling to the past in the original passage and developed them into an effective account of such a journey, giving a convincing explanation of the first bullet point. They also responded to the clues about Eckels' character, the likelihood

of his not following the rules laid down by Travis and gave a convincing explanation of the possible outcomes in the present of any mistake made in a past time.

As has been the case in previous sessions with this paper, the overall competence of candidates' written expression was of a good standard. By far the majority of scripts communicated their ideas clearly and without causing the reader to pause and re-read in order to understand what was being said. However, there was evidence of insecure punctuation, spelling and use of idiom. Most responses to the writing task were paragraphed, organised, of adequate length and written in an appropriate register. The most successful responses used carefully chosen vocabulary which effectively conveyed the leader's experience of visiting *the jungle of sixty million, two thousand and fifty-five years ago* and his concerns over reporting a mistake that might have serious consequences in the present. In the majority of cases, the response to the writing task was the strongest area of the candidate's performance. It should also be noted that the difficulty of reading the handwriting of some candidates was noticeably less of a problem in this session than in previous years; this improvement may well also have been due to the change in format of the question paper and was especially gratifying as this paper was marked on screen for the first time.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As stated above, nearly all candidates displayed a secure general understanding of the passage and this was reflected in their answers to the individual questions. The questions that proved the most demanding, and, therefore, those that proved to be the most effective discriminators, were those that tested appreciation and understanding of the vocabulary contained in the passage.

- (a) Most responses identified either the reference to going back in time or the speed of time passing and gained one out of the two marks available. The second mark required a comment about scenes or images going in reverse.
- (b) This question required candidates to do more than just explain the phrase in their own words. A comment about the sudden halting of movement or reaching their destination would have gained one mark. To gain the second mark reference to the author placing emphasis upon – or drawing attention to – that halting was required. As with **Question 1(a)** the majority of responses obtained the first mark and significantly fewer the second.
- (c) Most responses correctly identified two factual details out of three possible ones: the path floats 15 c.m. above the ground and/or does not touch anything; it is made of anti-gravity metal; its purpose is to stop hunters touching the world of the past.
- (d) This task entailed choosing three short phrases from a specified section of the passage and explaining how each of these phrases helps the reader to imagine the world of the past. There was one mark for each chosen phrase and one mark for each clear explanation. There were many phrases that candidates could have chosen. An example would be the phrase *a very old time indeed*. Together with an explanation that it indicates how far into the past they had travelled, this would have gained two marks.
- (e) This was a straightforward task that required responses to identify one specific word: *snorted*. It was essential that responses were specific about that word; indeed the mark could most simply be gained by writing just that word as an answer. Some candidates did not obtain this mark because they quoted a longer phrase, but without highlighting the specific word *snorted*.
- (f) This task required responses to summarise the details of what Eckels saw and heard during his journey to the past and while he was there. It was essential that responses focussed the summary on what he **saw** and **heard** as other details were not relevant. This is marked on the basis of one mark per relevant point, as noted above, and requires a close focus on the specific requirements of the task. Points that responses could have identified were:
 - (1) noise made by the machine (roared/howled/screamed)
 - (2) moving suns and moons/changing of days and nights
 - (3) sun stopping
 - (4) fog
 - (5) metal path

- (6) green wilderness/ferns/palms/jungle
- (7) swamp
- (8) moist grasses
- (9) cries of birds
- (10) flowers, the colour of blood.

- (g) This task involved giving an explanation of the warning given by Travis about the effects of killing an animal (a mouse in the example given in the passage) while they were in the past. The most successful responses were those that gave a clear explanation (in the candidate's own words) that included the key points: future families of the mouse will not exist; animals which need these mice for survival will not have them to feed off; there could be untold effects on the future. Those candidates who obtained the full four marks covered all these points and made explicit the links between them as well as showing clear understanding through the use of their own words.
- (h) For this task there were three chosen phrases which the candidates had to explain in their own words to demonstrate their understanding of the phrases. For each phrase there were two clear points:
- (i) stretched/went into the jungle/undergrowth (or appropriate synonym)
 - (ii) treading **heavily** on one will completely destroy it
 - (iii) the specific period of time.

For each phrase most candidates gained one mark. For example; most gained a mark for identifying the idea of killing or destruction in the word *annihilate* but very few did more than repeat the word *stamping* – to gain a second mark it was necessary to explain that the treading was heavy or clumsy.

Question 2

This question required candidates to imagine they were Travis who was in charge of the time safari. The situation was that Travis was writing a report on returning to his own time, the safari not having gone according to plan and some mistake or accident having occurred. There were three bullet points indicating general details to include and most responses covered these to some degree. Successful responses covered all three bullet points, identified the implication in the passage that Eckels was likely to be the cause of any problem and dealt with Travis' concerns about possible outcomes based upon the warning he gives in the passage about how actions in the past can affect the future. Most responses identified and developed the idea that an unmarked animal may have been killed – either deliberately or accidentally – or that the path had failed to prevent their touching the world of the past. They also gave a convincing explanation, by Travis, of how the mistake might have an impact on the future to which they have returned and some gave convincing explanations of how the company might deal with the problem. The most successful responses showed awareness of Eckels' character and developed the suggestion that he was argumentative or too independently-minded to follow Travis' instructions. They also developed the possibility of Travis' concerns about the response of his employer to the details in the report and the responsibility he carried as leader of the safari.

Most of the candidates understood the main requirements of the task and adopted an appropriate genre and register. Less successful candidates needed to include more detail from the passage rather than invent too much extraneous detail and/or develop a narrative that was not relevant. The least successful responses, albeit very much in the minority, lifted details and phrasing and tended to reproduce the passage without development.

Overall, the standard of candidates' written expression was at least satisfactory and at best, very good indeed. As previously mentioned, a good number of responses showed sufficient linguistic competence to write in an appropriate tone and to choose vocabulary aimed effectively at bringing the situation alive. Technically, these scripts showed a variety of sentence structures and were secure in spelling and punctuation. Indeed, most candidates communicated their ideas with some clarity although errors of sentence separation and uncertain spelling of straightforward vocabulary prevented many from achieving marks in the highest bands for writing.

In conclusion, the overall performance of candidates in this examination was pleasing and Centres should be congratulated both for the qualities shown in the answers produced and also for the obvious commitment to and interest in their work displayed by their candidates.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/21

Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading, although there were ten marks available for writing, five marks in **Question 1** and five marks in **Question 3**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- demonstrate close reading throughout the paper
- focus on all aspects of the question, including requirements detailed in bullet points, and do not add extra content which is not specified, especially in response to **Question 1**
- select relevant, convincing details from the passage which are interpreted and developed in own words
- respond in the appropriate genre and register for each question
- explore the meaning and effect of words and phrases equally for both sections of **Question 2**
- write at an appropriate length, informatively rather than commenting on the content, and in sufficient detail to show understanding of the points, in **Question 3**.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions have been detailed below.

General comments

This paper was similar in difficulty to last year's paper and there was a wider range of performance. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible in their ideas and in their level of language. There were some excellent responses to the first question, although some candidates treated it as an empathic or creative task. The second question was also sometimes answered well, with good answers exploring words and phrases rather than consisting of a paraphrase, commentary or description of the passage. Weaker candidates showed throughout the paper that their range of vocabulary was narrow, and that this limited their understanding of the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning, and their ability to explain clearly the responses evoked in the reader. The answers to the third question ranged from concise and precise answers to those that missed obvious points and which did not present the relevant points in the candidate's own words. Responses which scored high marks in their answers to this question showed that they had re-read Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

There was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish their answers in the time given, and those who allowed time to prepare their answers to all three questions were at an advantage, provided that their planning took the form of a list of notes or a spider diagram, rather than a rough draft. There were more plans included in scripts this session than previously. Centres should take note that highlighting may not be used on the scripts themselves, even in the planning.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English, though there were instances of overly informal responses, or of using listing rather than full sentences. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some responses were affected by unclear or limited style. It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences in **Questions 1** and **3**, as this does not demonstrate that they understand the wording of the original passages. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they have been asked to respond.

Most candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting. Some Centres' provision of unsuitable paper not of a standard size or with no margins caused difficulties of annotation for Examiners and of estimation of appropriate length of response for their candidates. For those candidates who word-process their answers, it is requested that they do not use single line spacing, or less than 12 point character size, and that they leave margins on the unlined paper. Single sheets of paper not tagged or kept together simply by being put inside the question paper run the risk of becoming separated. Some Centres allowed

candidates to write their answers on the question paper, which is not appropriate for a variety of reasons. Whole Centres had been instructed to answer the tasks in an order other than that printed on the question paper which did not seem to have been a benefit.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1: Imagine that you are the reporter, Rob Buchanan. You interview Dean Potter after the climb and ask the following questions: Incredible! How did you manage to climb the face so quickly?; How do you answer people who say that what you do is foolish?; Can you tell us about your relationship with your climbing partner, O'Neill? Write the words of the interview.

[20 marks]

Many candidates wrote balanced and appropriate interview responses. It was clear that they understood the need to answer the three bulleted questions using evidence or inference from the passage, and to allow the voice of Dean Potter to be conveyed. His passion for the sport and for beating speed records, and his lack of equipment and reasons for it, were explained in most responses, with better ones also referring to his training, his experience and his fearlessness. Weaker answers needed to focus on the set questions and the portrayal of Potter rather than giving extra questions to Buchanan, making him obtrusive. This often fragmented the response, weakening its structure, and thus reduced the writing mark. There were occasional examples of responses written in the wrong genre, as monologues or third person accounts containing reported speech. A few candidates got Potter and O'Neill and their roles confused. Weak answers required a focus on the idea of speed in response to the first bulleted question, and needed to analyse the current relationship between the two climbers in response to the third one. Here, they drifted into unnecessary and made-up life stories which could not be credited. Candidates also needed to remember that the interviewer had witnessed the climb so did not require information about the fall as a narrative reproduction.

Most of the marks given were for showing understanding of the passage and for using ideas within the framework of the interview, without overlap or repetition, and with supporting details. It was not possible to use all the details from the passage in the space available, but most responses managed to include the main ones, to do with the lack of equipment and the risk-taking. In good answers, references to Potter's taped fingers were made as a detail to support speed, there was mention of momentum and rhythm as factors, and Warren Harding was referred to as an illustration that times have changed with regard to the speed expectations for climbing.

The more the content of the passage was adapted to the response genre and to the focus of the question, the more likely it was that the mark for reading would be high. In less good answers there were examples of copying whole phrases and sentences from the passage and sometimes several lines were lifted with virtually no changes in the wording. Weak answers needed to make greater reference to the actual event which had just occurred, or to develop the things which went right or wrong into a viewpoint rather than listing. For example, the home-made harness was much mentioned, but not as part of any particular line of argument. Instead, they drifted away from the passage into speculation about the boring lives of people who thought he was foolish (bulleted Question 2), or into a general discussion of how much he cared for O'Neill as a person (bulleted Question 3), without providing evidence from the passage. The references to his being at one with the outdoors are a clue to his motivation for rock climbing and reasons why he is willing to take the (calculated) risks, however foolish. It did not sound convincing for Potter to be rudely dismissive of the view of others in response to bulleted Question 2, given his gentle temperament. It is equally unlikely, in the public context, that Potter would criticise his partner in bulleted Question 3 for character faults or climbing incompetence, but some responses took this line. Good responses showed an appreciation that the two men were mutually supportive and dependent, shared goals and techniques, and worked well as a team, as proved by the fall. They expressed this relationship in language more appropriate and professional than *we've got each other's backs*, which occurred quite often, or *we're good mates*. It required inference to talk about the joys of arriving at the top of the rock and feeling at one with nature, but this is clearly implied in the passage by the links to Tarzan, and good responses made use of such ideas, as well as the feeling the passage conveyed of Potter being a driven and determined man, with a startling *intensity* and *war cry*. His style of speech sounded more convincing if full of enthusiasm and exhilaration at what he had just achieved.

The writing mark of five reflected the ability of the candidate to write in a lifelike way which was nonetheless appropriate to a conversation between strangers for a formal purpose. Nearly all responses were able to at least hint at characterisation, and some referred to Potter's shyness or his nickname of Tarzan. A lack of planning, or at least of forethought, meant that sometimes material used in response to the first bulleted question would have been better left for the third, and this affected sequence and structure. Weaker

responses often needed to focus on the question sooner, not realising that a preamble simply describing the event, by either Buchanan or Potter, could not be rewarded. Less secure answers also needed to improve their sequencing, so that one idea lead on naturally to another related one, rather than being presented apparently randomly, or as part of a list. This made the voice sound less fluent, and the use of material seem mechanical.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Answer all given parts of the question in a balanced way.
- Focus on the actual questions and make sure they are answered.
- Answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing.
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas.
- Try to create a personality and a voice which shows your understanding of what you have read.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of: (a) O'Neill's fall in paragraph 3 and (b) Dean Potter in paragraph 5. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Generally, the first half of the question was answered better than the second, and many responses used *gentle giant* as the focus for an analysis of the contrasting sides of Potter's personality. Nearly all responses commented on the puppet image in **section (a)**, and on how this added a sense of panic and helplessness to the event being described. Some spent too long on the build up to the fall and had little to say about the incident itself. The best responses linked the choices together as a sustained metaphor of splayed limbs, falling on a string, being jerked to a stop, and the control of the puppet master. It was not enough to repeat that the image proved that O'Neill was *out of control* when this phrase is very general and is lifted from the passage. This question does not require a focus on literary terminology, for example, the comment *the onomatopoeic use of the word 'scrabble' makes the reader visualise it* is not credit worthy. Weaker responses needed to explain a whole phrase and give it a context rather than simply listing single adjectives, such as *horrible* and *desperate*. Meanings need to be conveyed, at least by implication, clearly and specifically, rather than inferred by the Examiner. Good answers took opportunities to explore words and phrases while less good answers contented themselves with literal meanings. For example, good responses looked at the word *jerks* and tied it in to the idea of being unexpectedly and violently brought up short at the end of a rope, whereas weaker responses gave the meaning of a sudden stop. To achieve marks in the top band, there needs to be a good selection of choices and focus at word level.

The first level of approach is to identify words that have an extra layer of meaning, and the second level is to be able to explain why the writer used them. An example was the phrase *gentle giant* in paragraph 5. Better responses talked about the contradiction inherent in this phrase, and explored what this implied about the character of Potter and what climbing did to him, working through the different layers from meaning to effect. They gave the primary meaning that a giant is physically huge and strong, but then went further to suggest this made him seem intimidating as a competitor, and linked this idea to the broader effect of the awesome status he holds within his sporting community, and how incompatible this is with his shy, unassuming demeanour when not climbing. However, most responses only paraphrased the two words.

Not all candidates understood the meaning of *wide-set* (thinking it referred to the width of his actual eyes), or *mane* (interpreting it as a beard), or *bout* (which they ignored), which limited the number of valid observations they could make in the first part of the question. Little was made of the lion image (*tumbling mane*) which could easily be linked to Tarzan and *brooding inhabitant*, and to the idea of physical strength and daring.

Long quotations and the group listing of words and phrases were common, and words within phrases were often not sufficiently distinguished. For instance, *flailing* and *splaying* are not synonymous and should have been explored separately. Analysis at individual word level was required in many scripts, which tended to generalise, and sometimes the associations of words were not relevant to the context, such as the fact that Tarzan is a cartoon character. Some candidates had difficulty selecting appropriate language to discuss, and picked apparently random adverbs, such as *suddenly* or *normally*.

There is no need to give the selections all together at the beginning of the response and then refer to them again lower down. A reasonable number of choices need to be selected in order for the response to be sufficiently substantial to answer the question. The following answer includes 15 selected quotations, and

these would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the choices and of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These examples are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate approach to the question.

(a) O'Neill's fall in paragraph 3

The 'scrabbling of hands and feet on rock' is the first sign of serious trouble as this frantic attempt to catch a hand and foothold signifies that the ascent is no longer going according to plan and that O'Neill is having difficulty remaining attached to the rock face. It prepares for the 'desperate yell: "Falling"' which follows. This is a dramatic utterance, with the idea of panic conveyed, and the more so by the use of inverted commas and exclamation mark. 'Dropping through space' suggests the movement of an object through an endless void, exaggerating the height and length of the fall and giving the impression that there is little hope of a safe landing. The 'arms flailing' creates a picture of swift, uncontrolled arm movements, in a pointless attempt to catch hold of something to save himself, and 'legs splaying' introduces the idea of a wide apart and unnatural leg position which is reinforced by the simile of 'like a manic puppet'. That O'Neill is compared to an inanimate object controlled by strings from above brings Potter into the picture as the puppeteer, who is holding him by the one rope and only string, all that is preventing his further fall; O'Neill's life is entirely in Potter's hands. That he 'jerks to a stop' makes clear the sudden jolt of his reaching the end of the rope after the experience of 'plunging', a verb which is stronger than falling because it conjures up the idea of a fast and unstoppable dive from high to low.

(b) Dean Potter in paragraph 5

That Dean Potter is described as a 'gentle giant' summarises the contrast between the two aspects of his personality, depending on whether he is climbing or not climbing. The modest and retiring man changes to one of bestial strength and power when he is performing a stunt. The 'wide-set brown eyes' and 'tumbling mane' are recognisable attributes of the lion, the king of the jungle, which links him also with Tarzan, the fictional character known for being at home in the jungle and among wild animals, and also for his climbing skills. The 'battered-looking nose' is testament to his experience on the rock face, and possible injuries caused by it, and his 'barrel chest' suggests his upper body strength. That he is a 'brooding inhabitant of the wild' not only makes clear how much of a rough outdoors type he is, but that he is always quietly thinking about the next challenge, always about to be 'roused to fantastic bouts of action' like a lion roaring to life or a boxer taking on the next fight.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a precise meaning, in the context, for each of your choices. That can gain you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they mean and then explain why they have been used in the passage.

Question 3: Summarise: (a) the ways in which paintballing is a safe sport, as described in Passage B and (b) the reasons why climbing the nose of El Capitan and the way Dean Potter makes this climb are dangerous, as described in Passage A.

[Total: 20]

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 23 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary. Some responses need to demonstrate understanding of what a summary is, rather than be descriptive or analytical.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A, on which candidates had already answered two questions. Candidates should not think that because they already know Passage A that they do not need to read it again. The material needs to be selected and used differently in each of the three questions. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes,

although sometimes these contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage B mentions the eye-masks more than once, but there was only one mark for this item. Good summaries avoided repetition.

While it was perfectly in order to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, in Passage B the information about the type of people who play the sport, about the safety measures, and about the low number of accidents could each have usefully been dealt with together for the sake of concision.

Candidates generally found it easy to identify summary points in Passage B. This meant that sometimes the response was list-like. Points 1, 2, 12 and 14 were rarely offered, suggesting that candidates dealt with the passage in order, rather than planning their answer logically and comprehensively, and that they may have ignored the first and last parts of the passage.

Better responses gave an informative summary. They avoided writing in a narrative style, giving introductory statements or long explanations, or making comments. Responses needed to avoid giving extraneous points not directly related to the question, for instance, that Potter was carrying spring-loaded devices, or the list of equipment which he did not take with him. In Passage B, the details of the paintball speed which masks can withstand, or the edible nature of paintballs, or the joking reference to falling over tree roots, were not required by the question. Such unnecessary explanations tended to not only reduce the amount of space available for dealing with **section (b)**, but also to make the summary as a whole longer than the required length. The mechanical reading of some candidates showed in their confusion between the rope and the harness, and in their erroneous claim that Potter used no equipment for this climb. Points 15, 18 and 23 were rarely mentioned, but were relevant to the question and acted as a differentiator for stronger responses demonstrating close reading.

The least good answers needed to demonstrate understanding of the passage and this is not possible by simply copying parts of the passages. This seemed to happen less this year. Technical terms, such as *medical form* and *harness*, did not need to be paraphrased, but candidates who successfully did so were credited the point. The *nose* in Passage A and the *friendly fight* in Passage B could and should have been changed into the candidate's own words.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Some candidates are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. Higher marks for writing are awarded where the candidate forms varied and fluent sentence structures, and the points are made with sufficient clarity that the Examiner does not need to give the point only as a benefit of doubt, or decide not to give it because it is a point not made.

Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is *grossly long* (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting) they are likely to score 0 marks for writing. As will be seen from the example given below, it was possible to write this summary quite briefly and succinctly. There were frequent examples of overlong summaries, and therefore of low writing marks for this question. Some candidates with very small handwriting wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as 15 words to a line, and this must obviously be taken into account. Suddenly small handwriting draws attention to the fact that the candidate is trying to get round the rubric.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as briefly as possible, and that they are also transformed into the writer's own words. The answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of paper with space to spare.

Passage B

Paintballing is safe enough for families and non-experienced people to participate in these pretend battles. A medical form must be completed to prove the satisfactory health of the players, who are then issued with protective clothing which includes an eye mask. The paintballs, being made of gel, are harmless, and they cannot be fired at speeds above the legal limit. An instructor gives guidance on the strict rules and arranges a practice session. Because the equipment is checked, accidents are very rare, and in fact other sports are more dangerous than paintballing.

Passage A

El Capitan is a notoriously difficult and much feared rock for climbers in the USA, because of its 2,000 foot vertical wall followed by an overhanging shelf, and its narrow handholds. Potter was under-equipped for his climb in various ways, including the fact that his harness was homemade and insubstantial. Added dangers were the necessity for reckless speed, which involved a rushed start rather than waiting until his partner had reached the first metal peg. Being joined by a rope meant that a fall by one of the pair could pull the other partner down too.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Give equal attention and focus to both sections of the response.
- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- Be careful to giving only information that is focused on the question.
- Only make a point once.
- Pay attention to length.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/22

Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading, although there were ten marks available for writing, five marks in **Question 1** and five marks in **Question 3**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- demonstrate close reading throughout the paper
- focus on all aspects of the question, including requirements detailed in bullet points, and do not add extra content which is not specified, especially in response to **Question 1**
- select relevant, convincing details from the passage which are interpreted and developed in own words
- respond in the appropriate genre and register for each question
- explore the meaning and effect of words and phrases equally for both sections of **Question 2**
- write at an appropriate length, informatively rather than commenting on the content, and in sufficient detail to show understanding of the points, in **Question 3**.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions have been detailed below.

General comments

Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible in their ideas and in their level of language. There were some excellent responses to the first question, although some candidates treated it as an empathic or creative task. The second question was also sometimes answered well with good answers exploring words and phrases rather than consisting of a paraphrase, commentary or description of the passage. Weaker candidates showed throughout the paper that their range of vocabulary was narrow, and that this limited their understanding of the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning, and their ability to explain clearly the responses evoked in the reader. The answers to the third question ranged from concise and precise answers to those that missed obvious points and which did not present the relevant points in the candidate's own words. Responses which scored high marks in their answers to this question showed that they had re-read Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

There was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish their answers in the time given, and those who allowed time to prepare their answers to all three questions were at an advantage, provided that their planning took the form of a list of notes or a spider diagram, rather than a rough draft. There were more plans included in scripts this session than previously. Centres should take note that highlighting may not be used on the scripts themselves, even in the planning.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English, though there were instances of overly informal responses, or of using listing rather than full sentences. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some responses were affected by unclear or limited style. It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences in **Questions 1** and **3**, as this does not demonstrate that they understand the wording of the original passages. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they have been asked to respond.

Most candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting. Some Centres' provision of unsuitable paper not of a standard size or with no margins caused difficulties of annotation for Examiners and of estimation of appropriate length of response for their candidates. For those candidates who word-process their answers, it is requested that they do not use single line spacing, or less than 12 point character size, and that they leave margins on the unlined paper. Single sheets of paper not tagged or kept together simply by being put inside the question paper run the risk of becoming separated. Some Centres allowed

candidates to write their answers on the question paper, which is not appropriate for a variety of reasons. Whole Centres had been instructed to answer the tasks in an order other than that printed on the question paper which did not seem to have been a benefit.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1: Imagine you work for the Ministry of Agriculture. You have been sent to conduct a second investigation as to whether there is large foreign cat activity on Bodmin Moor. Write a formal report on your findings. You should comment on: what the local people believe about the presence of a beast; the lack of conclusive proof and the alternative theories; and your recommendations with reasons.

[20 marks]

Many candidates wrote balanced, detailed and informative responses using the correct genre. It was clear that they understood the need to address all three parts of the question using evidence and inferences from the passage and to sustain a formal style. It was important that responses re-ordered the material as reliance on the original order of detail meant that some information was not always presented logically, thus reducing the writing mark for structure and sequence. It also reduced the cogency and credibility of the arguments and increased the likelihood of repetition of ideas.

Good responses integrated the evidence into a cohesive and convincing report. There was a clear overview and evidence was linked and presented using evaluative and persuasive language. When addressing the first bullet point, the beliefs of the locals, good responses selected relevant detail and re-ordered the material in order that the evidence could be evaluated and questioned. The sequencing was effective and allowed for evidence to be discussed in a logical and coherent way. There was a degree of objectivity and impartiality and also some appropriate judgements about the reliability of the evidence, for example, that the video was short and of poor quality making it difficult to determine that the images were of big cats.

In less good responses the material needed to be re-organised more effectively as mentioned above. This approach also made it more difficult for candidates to submit alternative explanations in the second part of the task. The report required clear development of ideas, rather than mechanical use of the passage, presenting evidence which was list-like and very close to the original. In some responses the reference to the eye witness was used successfully and the reliability of his sighting, given that it was a gloomy November afternoon, was questioned. Some responses contained quotation from the farmer which could have been more effectively presented. Some responses confused the persona and assumed that the narrator of the passage was also the writer of the government report, and then lapsed into a narrative style with a detailed, and not wholly relevant, description of the beast which made the report seem less impartial and objective.

The second part of the task often required greater coherence by being addressed in a clear and organised way. Some responses displayed a lack of understanding of the significance of the evidence and an uncertainty about whether it could be used to support or oppose the claims by the locals. For example, the evidence concerning the sample of hair, the puma paw prints and the leopard skull was not made relevant or discussed clearly. The arguments were sometimes contradictory and not sustained.

In addressing the third part of the task many responses contained sound and measured conclusions. Most suggested that there should be a further investigation and made appropriate references to the passage when discussing why and how this should be carried out. Some responses made reference to the views of the locals; that they wanted the animal restrained rather than killed and several recommendations reflected these wishes. Good responses explained the need to protect the farmers' livestock and their livelihoods and suggested some sensible and specific measures, for example, protective fencing, alarm systems and laying traps for the beast. Other practical suggestions included night patrols and CCTV cameras. Some stressed the need to end the rumour and speculation and to assure farmers that their claims were taken seriously and that the government was supporting them. Suggestions to re-examine the hair sample and use forensic evidence to examine the injuries of the sheep, and the video and sound recordings, showed a close reading and a good understanding of the passage.

Good responses sustained a formal and fluent style, a convincing sense of audience and used appropriate language. The material was organised effectively with a useful introduction and conclusion, resulting in a high writing mark. Less good responses gave brief opinions about the existence of the beast but needed to make reference to the evidence. Some responses contained general recommendations about protecting farmers and catching the animal without giving specific suggestions or reasons for them. Some responses

changed the voice and audience of the report and directly addressed the farmers, giving them advice in the style of a public announcement.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Answer all given parts of the question in a balanced way.
- Focus on the actual tasks in the bullet points and make sure they are answered.
- Answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing.
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas.
- Try to create an appropriate voice and style which shows your understanding of the task and what you have read.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of: (a) the appearance of the beast in paragraph 4 and (b) the appearance of the farmer and his farm in paragraph 5. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

In general the first part of the question was answered better than the second mainly because the choices of words were more relevant and explained with more clarity and precision. In **section (a)** many responses gave an overview or impression of a potentially dangerous, large and powerful animal. Good answers explained words and effects within the context of the passage. Less good responses gave more literal meanings, for example, *startlingly large* was explained as surprisingly big without explaining that the writer was not expecting to see such an unusually big cat in those surroundings. Similarly, some responses explained *coarse, raven-black coat* as rough and very dark without explaining that domestic cats have soft fur, or exploring the connotations of the word *raven*. Some responses explained meanings by repeating words of the original. The passage refers to the strength and speed of engine pistons and some explanations repeated these words instead of using other comparisons; for example, the mechanical action and power of machinery.

Long quotation and the group listing of words and phrases were common, making it difficult to disentangle the explanations of specific words. *Unhurried, sinuous* and *fluid* are not synonymous; the words require individual explanation. Some did not go beyond explaining the slow movement of the cat. There was an opportunity to explore the references to the movement of a snake. Good responses explored the extended imagery of snakes, both in the use of *sinuous* and in *curved snake of a tail*. They also discussed the casual and relaxed stance of the animal and its lack of fear. It was not in a hurry because it was confident and in a position of power. Few responses explained the use of *great, yellow, black-slitted orbs*, although some commented on the size of the creature's eyes.

In **section (b)** the choices were less relevant. Some included *handwritten sign* and *rushing stream*. These words are rather ordinary and responses are better rewarded for providing more unusual words and phrases from which deeper meanings and effects can be explored. There were some general comments about the age and poor state of the farm but these were not always supported by specific quotations. There were also some literal meanings, for example, that *tremendous whiskers* referred to the size of the farmer's moustache.

There is no need to give the selections all together at the beginning of the response and then refer to them again lower down. A reasonable number of choices need to be selected in order for the response to be sufficiently substantial to answer the question. The following response includes ten selected quotations for each part. Even 15 in total would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the choices and of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These examples are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate approach to the question.

(a) **The appearance of the beast in paragraph 4**

The writer has created an image of a dangerous and powerful beast. 'Startlingly large, black feline' suggests that the writer was surprised to see such an unusually large cat in the area. The word 'black' makes one think of evil or witchcraft, as witches are associated with black cats. Later the writer refers to its 'coarse, raven-black coat', suggesting that his fur was rough, unkempt and maybe unpleasant to the touch, unlike the soft fur of domestic cats. Ravens, being sinister birds of prey, have connotations of evil as bringers of bad news, conveying a feeling of fear to the reader. 'Sinuous, fluid' suggests ease of movement and the ability to slither away. 'Sinuous' has associations of long snakes and 'fluid' suggests an easy flow which opposes the

creature's huge size. The word 'unhurried' suggests that it was moving slowly and calmly in a casual and relaxed way, as if taking a stroll. This suggests it was comfortable in its environment and confident enough not to run away. The 'curved snake of a tail' continues the serpent imagery of elusiveness and also danger. The 'victory salute' appears to be mocking the narrator; it has won because of its supremacy and power. 'Thick, sinewy shoulders' suggest a broad and muscular body and therefore its potential danger. The writer compares its strength and speed to that of 'engine pistons', suggesting a smooth, mechanical movement and the synchronisation of its body parts. This is a contrast to its grace and elegance. Because of its 'pricked, tufted ears', it appears alert and ready to attack, like a wild predator. 'Yellow, black-slitted orbs' are a feature of monsters in fairy tales or of alien creatures or the devil. This conveys a sense of evil and instils fear. 'Orbs' are large and round spheres, suggesting that the creature can see everything.

(b) The description of the farmer and the farm in paragraph 5

The impression we have is that the farm is run down and neglected. The farmer appears to be besieged and under threat of the big cats. 'Rickety, rotting footbridge' implies decay and instability, as if the bridge will collapse, giving a sense of danger. 'Battered sign' suggests that there is damage, either from the elements or from an attack by the beast. The sign is 'ominous', suggesting a terrible impending event. It is also 'ambiguously addressed', adding a touch of humour as it is unclear whether the message is warning people about cats or telling the cats to keep away. The farmer is presented as a typical person of the countryside and the rural image is conveyed throughout the paragraph. His face is described as 'shiny', which could be a sign of health or an indication that he is sweating because of anxiety and fear of the big cats. His face is 'weather-beaten', suggesting that he works outdoors and is constantly under attack by the elements. 'His tremendous whiskers' are huge and remind us of the whiskers of the cats that he fears. The image of his hat further reinforces the country qualities of the man. It is described as 'crusty' and the 'colour of an over-cooked pie'. This could refer to its shape – round with raised edges – but also to its hard and brittle texture, as if it has, like the farmer, been left in the sun too long. The 'stained oak table' is brown, like the hat. It also adds to the domestic scene and suggests that the table has been well used, like the other items, or is old and not taken care of. The overall feeling is that everything is worn down and also vulnerable to attack.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a precise meaning, in the context, for each of your choices. That can gain you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they mean and then explain why they have been used in the passage.

Question 3: Summarise: (a) the reasons for *not* believing in the existence of unicorns and yetis, according to Passage B and (b) the actual evidence for the existence of the beast of Bodmin Moor, according to Passage A.

[Total: 20]

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 23 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary. Some responses needed to demonstrate understanding of what a summary is, rather than be descriptive or analytical.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A, on which candidates had already answered two questions. Candidates should not think that because they already know Passage A that they do not need to read it again. The material needs to be selected and used differently in each of the three questions. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes, although sometimes these contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage A mentions that dogs make a noise and leave a mess whereas cats are different: they kill quickly and silently. Good summaries avoided repetition of similar points.

While it was perfectly in order to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, in Passage A the information about the puma paw prints and the mating call could have usefully been dealt with together for the sake of concision.

Candidates generally found it easy to identify summary points in Passage B. This meant that sometimes the response was list-like. Points 4, 10 and 11 were rarely offered, suggesting that candidates dealt with the passage in order, rather than planning their answer logically and comprehensively, and that they ignored the last part of the passage.

Better responses gave an informative summary. They avoided writing in a narrative style, giving introductory statements or long explanations, or making comments. Responses needed to avoid giving extraneous points not directly related to the question for instance, giving descriptions of the yeti and its surroundings. Also explanations of the yeti relics were often too detailed; the whole of the fourth paragraph could have been summarised into one short sentence. Such unnecessary explanations tended to not only reduce the amount of space available for dealing with **section (b)**, but also to make the summary as a whole longer than the required length. In passage A the mechanical reading of some candidates showed in their confusion regarding the leopard skull, which was not evidence of big cat activity in the area. Points 15 and 16 were not often mentioned, but were relevant to the question and acted as a differentiator for stronger candidates demonstrating close reading.

The least good answers needed to demonstrate understanding of the passage and this would not be possible by simply copying parts of the passages. This seemed to happen less this year. Technical terms, such as *night vision goggles*, did not need to be paraphrased – but candidates who successfully did so were credited the point. *Captured the beast on video* in Passage A could and should have been changed into the candidate's own words.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Some candidates are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. Higher marks for writing were awarded where the candidate forms varied, sentence structures were fluent, and the points were made with sufficient clarity that the Examiner does not need to give the point only as a benefit of doubt, or decide not to give it because it is a point not made.

Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is *grossly long* (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting) they are likely to score 0 marks for writing. As will be seen from the example given below, it was possible to write this summary quite briefly and succinctly. There were frequent examples of overlong summaries, and therefore of low writing marks for this question. Some candidates with very small handwriting wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as 15 words to a line, and this must obviously be taken into account. Suddenly small handwriting draws attention to the fact that the candidate is trying to get round the rubric.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as briefly as possible, and that they are also transformed into the writer's own words. The answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of A4 paper with space to spare.

Passage B

Unicorns, which are supposed to be similar in appearance to other animals and therefore easily confused with them, have been part of traditional folklore dating back several centuries. Vavra's book offered no actual proof of their existence. Similarly, the photograph of a large footprint does not prove the existence of the yeti, neither do the numerous 'relics'. The yeti scalp came from a mountain goat, the primate hand disappeared, and the mummified body was a fake. The sightings of large hairy creatures are probably apes, or, in Messner's case, a Tibetan bear. Nepalese Sherpas from Tibet told legends of their native animals that may have been distorted into yeti stories.

Passage A

Many people claim to have seen the beast responsible for the mass slaughter of sheep. Its appearance is different from that of local animals and there is a video showing big cats in the area, as well as evidence of long scratch marks on sheep. Paw prints were identified as those of a puma and the screaming heard at night is believed to be a puma mating call. The sample of hair sent for analysis was not returned, and the government have not dismissed the idea of large cats in the area. Before the attacks local animals behave strangely, and the style of killing the livestock is typical of that of a large cat: fast, quiet and clean.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Give equal attention and focus to both sections of the response.
- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- Be careful to giving only information that is focused on the question.
- Only make a point once.
- Pay attention to length.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/23

Reading Passages (Extended)

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for reading, although there were ten marks available for writing, five marks in **Question 1** and five marks in **Question 3**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- demonstrate close reading throughout the paper
- focus on all aspects of the question, including requirements detailed in bullet points, and do not add extra content which is not specified, especially in response to **Question 1**
- select relevant, convincing details from the passage which are interpreted and developed in own words
- respond in the appropriate genre and register for each question
- explore the meaning and effect of words and phrases equally for both sections of **Question 2**
- write at an appropriate length, informatively rather than commenting on the content, and in sufficient detail to show understanding of the points, in **Question 3**.

Key messages about how candidates can improve their performance for each of the three types of questions have been detailed below.

General comments

This paper was similar in difficulty to last year's paper. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible in their ideas and in their level of language. There were some good responses to the first question, although some candidates approached the task from a different perspective than the one specified in the question. The second question was also sometimes answered well with good answers exploring words and phrases rather than consisting of a paraphrase, commentary or description of the passage. Weaker candidates showed throughout the paper that their range of vocabulary was narrow; this limited their understanding of the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning, and their ability to explain clearly the responses evoked in the reader. The answers to the third question ranged from concise and precise answers to those that missed obvious points and which did not present the relevant points in the candidate's own words. Candidates who scored high marks in their answers to this question showed that they had re-read Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

There was no evidence that candidates were unable to finish the paper in the time given, and those who allowed time to prepare their answers to all three questions were at an advantage, provided that their planning took the form of a list of notes or a spider diagram, rather than a rough draft. Centres should take note that highlighting may not be used on the scripts themselves, even in the planning.

Most candidates answered their questions in appropriate English, though there were instances of using listing rather than full sentences. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' responses were affected by unclear or limited expression. It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences in **Questions 1** and **3**, as this does not demonstrate that they have understood the wording of the original passages. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they have been asked to respond.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1: Imagine that you are the old man in the final paragraphs (When we returned...after our visit). Write a letter to your sister, who lives in a different part of the country. In your letter, you should describe, in your own words, what has happened to the town and express your thoughts and emotions about the past, present and future.

[20 marks]

The writer of the letter in the set task could have been the elderly man from paragraph 3 who had been thrown to the ground by the explosion. It was clear that he is a native of the town who had worked at the silo for 35 years, and the passage pointed out that his expressionless face was probably masking emotions regarding the past, present and future. The writer might also have been the owner of the cottage with the lovely flowers and ripe tomatoes. One response suggested that the writer could take comfort in his garden, and another indicated that though the shock of the events was prompting him to consider moving away from the town, he would miss his much admired garden.

Some candidates needed to re-read the passage carefully and to ensure that they adopted the correct persona for their answer. Some chose to be the narrator of the original passage, one of the elderly tourists on the coach, or a previous inhabitant of the town who visits some days after the explosion (sometimes doubling this with the narrator of the original passage). Band 3 of the mark scheme for Content requires there being *focus on the task*.

Candidates were directed to specific areas on which to concentrate. However, many addressed only the facts of the explosion a few days previously, i.e. the present and the future, but needed to add something about the past.

Many candidates were able to explain what had happened in the accident, some in their own words, some paraphrasing the passage, and some simply copying phrases. Misunderstandings included that significant sections of the town had been destroyed along with the silo, and that the directors had been killed. It is unclear whether the writer intended to convey that the elderly man walking past who had been thrown to the ground had died, therefore it was acceptable for candidates to imagine that this was what had happened to him. There were, however, several candidates who did not mention that there had been an accident.

The present could have included the on-going trauma resulting from the explosion, grief at the destruction, the ugly remains of the silo, the immediate unemployment caused, the dust and the insensitive tourists. This section was dealt with the most successfully by most candidates. However, some responses translated the *thin layer of dust* into thick layers of debris all over the town, clearly impossible if the narrator and his wife could enjoy their walk, taking in *bright flowers* and *ripe tomatoes*. For many, a general comment about being upset was the only discernible point for this bulleted question.

There were sufficient details in the passage for some inference and imaginative extension of the past, relating, for example, to the kindness shown by the directors who had fortunately left the building before the explosion. Additionally, responses could have mentioned childhood and teenage memories involving excursions to go grape-picking, swimming in the river, and/or attending church (one writer had returned to the church to pray for help in this hour of need). Answers could have focused on gratitude that certain key buildings had escaped and thus memories, e.g. of school trips to the museum, remained untarnished. Trips to the market with the sister would also have attracted some credit. However, a significant proportion of responses did not deal with the past at all. There were also several responses which inserted a reference to the old buildings, museum and church without sufficient modification to fit the focus of the task.

References to the future could have included mention of fear that the beauty and atmosphere had been permanently destroyed, of long-term unemployment, of the impact of tourists, and, particularly, of the mayor's plans and what changes these might bring. One response made the sensible suggestion that ex-employees from the silo might get seasonal work picking grapes. Few responses considered the proposals in their answers, and weaker responses listed the plans for *a marina, two ten-storey hotels...*, which is only *mechanical use of the passage*. On the other hand, to change the level of the proposed development from a few to many hotels and casinos is not reading the passage closely but rather changing the information in it. A good proportion of the answers made general reference to the destruction of the town's beauty, but it was difficult to give credit if this idea had already been used in response to the present. Some misunderstandings here were that a hotel was proposed in place of the cottage in paragraph 5, or had already been planned to replace the silo.

The more the content of the passage was adapted to the response genre and to the focus of the question, the more likely it was that the mark for reading would be high. A lack of planning, or at least of forethought, meant that weaker responses often took a long time to focus on the question, particularly if the wrong persona had been adopted and the response was written as if by the narrator of the original passage, so that the description of the town was followed, for example, by that of the journey to the town through the attractive countryside. Less secure answers also needed to improve their sequencing, so that one idea lead on naturally to another related one, rather than being presented apparently randomly, or as part of a list. This made the voice sound less fluent, and the use of material seem mechanical.

The writing mark of five reflected the ability of the candidate to write in a lifelike way which was also appropriate to a letter to a close relative by an adult who had recently undergone a traumatic experience. Good responses were able to convey shock, weariness, and nostalgia, for example. However, others needed to maintain a truthful interpretation of the passage whilst expressing extreme emotion, rather than presenting flights of fancy, sometimes moving a long way away from the passage.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Answer all given parts of the Question in a balanced way.
- Focus on the actual questions and make sure they are answered.
- Answer in your own words and adapt material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing.
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and use plenty of detail to support your ideas.
- Try to create a personality and a voice which shows your understanding of what you have read.

Question 2: Re-read the description of: (a) the elderly tourists in paragraph 2 and (b) the explosion and its effects on the area in paragraph 4. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

This question was answered at least partially successfully. There were fewer examples than is often the case of responses providing a reasonable number of choices in **section (a)** but very few in **section (b)**. There were seven possible choices in **section (a)** and nine in **section (b)**, and many responses gave at least four from each section. The better responses avoided the temptation either to choose a long quotation which included several valid choices, or to group together several individual choices and try to give an umbrella explanation for them.

This question does not require a focus on literary terminology; for example, the comment *the onomatopoeic use of the word 'tumbled' makes the reader visualise the way the elderly tourists left the bus* is not creditworthy. Many candidates were able to identify imagery and make good attempts to deal with some of it. The most obvious images were to do with *assault* and the *gang of little children* in **section (a)** and the *thunderbolt, firework display* and *golden rain* in **section (b)**. Some responses made valid links between the choices, e.g. *assault, cameras at the ready* and *gang*.

Meanings need to be conveyed, at least by implication, clearly and specifically, rather than inferred by the Examiner. Good answers took opportunities to explore words and phrases, while less good answers only provided literal meanings. Focus at word level was required to gain marks in the top bands. Chunks of long quotation and the group listing of words and phrases happened occasionally and in such instances words within phrases were often not sufficiently distinguished. For instance, *gang* and *little children* should have been explored separately before moving on to the overall impression given by the phrase. There is no need to give the selections all together at the beginning of the response and then refer to them again lower down.

The first level of approach is to identify words that have an extra layer of meaning, and the second level is to be able to explain why the writer used them. Thus the primary meaning of a *firework display* is a festive event at which a variety of noisy and colourful devices illuminate the sky and evoke gasps of pleasure from the onlookers. The next level of meaning is that the coloured grains from the silo arced into the air with an attendant noise which shocked bystanders with the force of the explosion. Many candidates did not understand the specific meaning of *thunderbolt* (simply defining thunder) or *imploded* (interpreting it as an explosion).

A reasonable number of choices needed to be selected in order for the response to be sufficiently substantial to answer the question. The following answer includes all the appropriate choices, although not all would

have been necessary for the award of the top mark, provided that the quality of the choices and of the explanation was high and consistent enough. It is important that there is a balance between the number of choices across both sections. This full answer which includes 15 selected quotations is given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate approach to the question.

(a) The elderly tourists in paragraph 2

The elderly tourists are represented as noisy and excitable, disorganised and insensitive: they are an 'excited gang of young children'. We find gangs disturbing – they are lawless, unpredictable and probably intent on vandalism. That this 'gang' is likened to 'young children' suggests they are not of the criminal kind, but 40 to 50 of them would still be capable of causing quite a disturbance. They indulge in 'noisy chatter', indicating the loud aimlessness of their talk rather than the quiet tone of respectful visitors to a tragedy-struck town. Their lack of discipline is reinforced by the fact they 'tumbled' from the coach, a clumsy and sudden movement again associated with young children or animals. This is an exaggeration of the movements of these elderly tourists, but their mood is clearly at odds with that of the setting. Having descended from the bus, they begin their 'assault' on the town, a strong image of warfare; the troops have arrived and are ready for battle. They could take the town, much like invading forces, and as they 'scatter' in all directions they have their 'cameras at the ready' in the same way as soldiers would have guns. They will 'shatter' the midday peace, another violent word often used when glass or something fragile breaks – in this case the precious peace of the aftermath of the accident.

(b) The explosion and its effects on the area in paragraph 4

Several of the phrases describing the explosion give a sense of power and awe. The extreme force is likened to a 'thunderbolt', a lightning strike accompanying a roll of thunder which is usually associated with the anger of the gods and an act of destruction. Accompanying the bangs and whizzes are the rockets and other spectacular visual effects of a 'firework display'. It is 'ironic' that the exploding grain and parts of the building are compared to something normally perceived as a pleasant experience. A firework is made up of many small grains of coloured matter, and so is this 'golden rain' of grain, now on fire. The grain returns to the ground in a shower, just as a firework falls when it is spent. The corn is also 'golden' in the sense that it was the foundation of the economic wealth of the town, now lost by being spread uselessly on the ground. The building 'imploded', collapsing inwards with the associated idea of the noise of clapping. The force of the explosion has made the concrete 'jagged', the harsh sounds of the word underlining the sharpness of the shapes, also reinforced by the word 'spiky'. The edges are 'serrated', as though cut with a saw; this is surprising as we think of concrete as something in rectangular blocks with straight edges, and this lends power to the image and to the force of the explosion.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Choose some words and phrases that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, try to at least give a precise meaning, in the context, for each of your choices. That can gain you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to recognise images and explain them (but you do not need to know or to give their technical names). Say what they mean and then explain why they have been used in the passage.

Question 3: Summarise: (a) what makes the Jiuzhaigou valley and lakes attractive to tourists, as described in Passage B and (b) what made the town attractive to the writer and his wife, as described in Passage A.

[Total: 20]

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 23 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous leeway. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Some candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary whereas

some responses needed to demonstrate understanding of what a summary is, rather than be descriptive or analytical.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A, on which candidates had already answered two questions. Candidates should not think that because they already know Passage A that they do not need to read it again. The material needs to be selected and used differently in each of the three questions. There was evidence that some candidates had made notes, although sometimes these contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage A mentions the nature of the lakes more than once, but there was only one mark for this item. Good summaries avoided repetition.

While it was perfectly in order to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, for the sake of concision, in Passage A the information about the natural attractions of the area could have usefully been dealt with together, and the tourists amenities in another part of the answer.

Candidates generally found it easy to identify summary points in Passage B. This meant that sometimes the response was list-like. Points 12, 13, 14 and 15 were rarely offered, suggesting that candidates dealt with the passage in order, rather than planning their answer logically and comprehensively, and that they ignored the last part of the passage.

Better responses gave an informative summary. They avoided writing in a narrative style, giving introductory statements or long explanations, or making comments. Candidates also needed to avoid giving extraneous points not directly related to the question, for instance, that the couple enjoyed the journey to the town. The lack of precise reading of some candidates showed in their misreading of certain features, e.g. that there were churches and museums or that the buildings were attractive, rather than that they were stone and represented centuries of history. The least good answers were those that simply copied parts of the passages, as this does not demonstrate understanding. Vocabulary such as *church* and *museum*, did not need to be paraphrased.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Some candidates lost the focus of their answers because they strayed away from the question or started to comment on the facts. They are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. Higher marks for writing are awarded where the candidate forms varied, where sentence structures are fluent, and the points are made with sufficient clarity so that the Examiner does not need to give the point only as a benefit of doubt, or decide not to give it because it is a point not made.

Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is *grossly long* (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting) they are likely to score 0 marks for writing. As will be seen from the example given below, it was possible to write this summary quite briefly and succinctly. There were frequent examples of overlong summaries, and therefore of low writing marks for this question. Some candidates with very small handwriting wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting and word-processing can fit as many as 15 words to a line, and this must obviously be taken into account. Suddenly small handwriting draws attention to the fact that the candidate is trying to get round the rubric.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as briefly as possible, and that they are also transformed into the writer's own words. The answer, if handwritten, would fit onto a side of A4 paper with space to spare.

Passage B

Tourists are attracted to the pollution-free Nature Reserve where many relaxed walks take in amazing watery views, including a number of long, narrow lakes and crashing waterfalls. The lakes of many colours also have evocative names, which are often associated with Buddhist mysticism. The route up the valley takes visitors through forests of different species of trees to an incredible height of 3,000 metres. On a practical level, there are many hotels to choose to stay in, as well as a cafeteria and a shopping centre specifically focused on tourist needs. By the road up the valley, along which visitors are transported by numerous buses, traditionally-clad Tibetans sell souvenirs.

Passage A

The town's situation on the banks of a river contributed to its peaceful atmosphere. Having observed there was a market on the quayside, the couple moved into the heart of the town. Within its interesting layout of squares and walkways, the writer and his wife were attracted by the old stone buildings, particularly the church and museum, which represented three centuries of history. Additionally, they appreciated the public gardens and one particular small cottage with its own pretty, productive patch of fruit and vegetables.

Key messages

Key ways candidates can improve their performance on this type of answer:

- Give equal attention and focus to both sections of the response.
- Explain points briefly, but in sufficient detail to show what they mean in the context.
- Do not copy whole phrases from the original.
- Write informatively and never comment on the content of the passage.
- Be careful to giving only information that is focused on the question.
- Only make a point once.
- Pay attention to length.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/31

Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience
- structure each answer overall and to sequence sentences in well-formed individual paragraphs
- create credible and effective arguments, and to write descriptions and stories that are realistic, original and engaging in their content
- write in a variety of well-formed sentence types, including complex sentences
- use a wide range of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

General comments

This paper was frequently well answered. The writing was often lively and there was an awareness of the requirements set by the mark scheme, where the band descriptors generally remain the same from session to session.

The amount of reading set for **Question 1** was slightly shorter than in previous sessions and this had the advantage that a reasonable number of ideas and opinions were included in the passage and therefore it was easier for candidates to concentrate on them. The question also discouraged copying from the passage and therefore loss of marks. The more original the language that was used, the more the responses revealed an ability to write.

In the composition section the number of responses to **Question 3(a)** and **(b)**, the descriptions, continued to increase. Most descriptive responses avoided writing a narrative. They were based on short time spans and occasional events were judiciously included.

There was an increase in the standard of argumentative and discursive writing as more responses were structured and use was made of the considerable amount of content that was available to answer both topics, particularly **Question 2(a)**.

The narratives continued to exhibit the strengths and weaknesses that have been given in previous reports.

The best compositions were always the most original. Some of the answers to each of the topics were stereotypical. Responses that went through the motions in this manner rarely showed any excitement and involvement on the part of the writer. The Examiners were always ready to credit unusual and interesting approaches.

The guide of one and a half to two sides for answers to **Question 1** indicated a length that was sufficient for the award of full marks if the quality of the reading and writing was high enough. Some responses were four or five sides long and this was also true of some of the compositions. It was not always the case that extra length, which was sometimes difficult to sustain, attracted extra marks. In the compositions for example, the writing often became more careless as time ran out. There were however, no automatic penalties for exceeding the suggested length.

There was evidence that Centres encouraged handwriting that was neat and of a reasonable size. Some scripts were untidy and hastily written and on occasion were self-penalising.

A significant number of scripts were word-processed and it was noted that in some, a good deal of error was caused in the typing process and marks were lost. Proof reading was essential but lacking in these cases. There were occasional errors of spelling and language that suggested that spell checks might have been used.

There was a good deal of accuracy of writing from many Centres. However, despite evidence of competence, in some cases the writing still contained many errors, often of punctuation. The commonest error was the failure to use full stops to separate sentences or commas to separate units within sentences. Apostrophes were commonly wrong. In descriptive and narrative writing unjustified changes of tense were common. There were many examples of using 'also' and 'and' to begin sentences. Expressions such as 'in front' and 'at last', which should be written as two words, were often given as one.

Comments on individual questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: Read the following transcript from a radio programme, which is an interview with the editor of *World Wonders*, a book of records published annually. Imagine that you have heard the discussion. Write a letter to the producer of the programme to express your views on whether or not such books should exist. In your letter you should examine the reasons the editor gives for publishing this book, examine the reasons why the editor feels it should not be published and give your own view and develop your arguments. Begin your letter, 'Dear Producer...'. Base what you write on the ideas in the transcript and be careful to use your own words.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

Much interest was shown in the content of this transcript, which was original and unusual. It also offered many possibilities for an evaluation of the ideas and opinions that were put forward by both speakers.

Some of the answers were strongly in favour of the book while others were equally strongly against, and there was no reason to suspect that these were not genuine attitudes. No extra credit was given for expressing views on one side rather than the other. Some letters that followed the content of the transcript closely and did not express a firm view were less effective.

The marks for reading

The first and second bullet required candidates to *examine* reasons and not to state or to paraphrase them. The word *examine* tied in with the requirement in Band 1 of the mark scheme to *make a thorough, perceptive, convincing evaluation of the ideas in the interview*. The best of the letters commented on various major ideas and developed them in a way that was both relevant to the tone of the interview and that represented personal thought. The Examiners rewarded answers that evaluated what was said, perhaps differentiating between fact and opinion and identifying arguments that were inconsistent. The mark scheme for Band 2 also specified evaluation and development of the ideas in the passage, but did not require this to be so consistent. Band 1 answers presented a firm argument and integrated the content rather than using the passage to support it.

It was the third bullet that prompted candidates to take a stance on the issue. Although this was mostly done in the final paragraph of the letter, giving *your own view and developing your arguments* formed the basis of the best of the letters.

Many of the letters were cautious about expressing views that were not entirely those of the editor and the interviewer. Some were very detailed and showed that the transcript had been well read and understood. They were written in original language and the best were just beyond paraphrase. Although they *missed opportunities to develop content relevantly or at length* (Band 3), they used the material thoroughly and were given marks as high as seven. However, the Band 3 marks of 5 and 6 were more typical of this use of the content.

The lowest marks for reading were for letters that used little of the reading material. Some letters could have developed more than one or two ideas from the passage, which would have prevented them from being repetitive or straying away from the content. Others repeated the material very literally. The first part of the transcript was frequently copied or almost copied. The phrases *best-selling annual of all time*, *particularly interested in facts and stories about anything extreme* and *human records as well as physical and natural ones* appeared regularly. *A thirst for knowledge in the young* was the commonest example of lifting from the passage.

The marks for writing

The best writing presented the argument in fluent and persuasive language. It was also structured in the best form for the letter as distinct from copying the sequence of the transcript. The most effective scripts were those that integrated the three ideas suggested by the three bullets. However, most responses were divided up into the three sections that followed the sequence given in the question paper. Most answers had some sense of structure and only a few drifted from idea to idea. Some answers needed to spend more space tackling issues such as whether the introduction of trivial records added entertainment to the book or devalued it rather than repeating the history of the book and the introductory information.

Examiners looked for effective use of the language of evaluation and argument, and the best writing was frequently that which had a strong voice. Occasional letters overdid the strength of expression and sacrificed argument for bombast. Less effective writing was more factual in that it reported the content of the transcript.

The accuracy and style of this exercise was sometimes better than that of the composition. This may have been because it was the first question to be answered. However, to a certain extent, the language of the answer was given a sense of direction and style by the language of the original. This sometimes led to rather straightforward, unadventurous writing. Copying from the passage impeded originality of expression in the letters.

The overall marks for this question were frequently very similar to those given for the composition.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure that you select ideas and opinions from the reading material and evaluate them in relation to the context of the task.
- Especially look for arguments that are inconsistent and be aware of the difference between fact and opinion.
- Always use your own words. Do not copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage.
- Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully of how you present an article or a letter, for example.
- Write with a voice. Think of who your reader is and express your point of view firmly.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

(a) Are you glad to be living at the present time or would you prefer to have been alive in a previous historical period? Explain the reasons for your choice.

[25 marks]

OR

(b) 'The world is changed by the small actions of ordinary people, not by the big actions of important people'. Discuss this claim.

[25 marks]

The report for last June's session noted an increase in the standard of writing for **Question 2**. However, it is important to remind Centres that candidates need to provide a convincing structure in their work to achieve well in for this type of question.

The best answers were those that contained a wide selection of ideas and developed each one of them at a satisfying length. They had an overall shape, so that the reader did not feel that content was arranged in a random order. Different parts of the whole were treated with similar importance. The arguments could be followed and the sequences avoided repetition.

Average responses contained some good ideas but were less consistent. Some started well but the quality of the content waned as the writing continued. It is important that responses avoid frequent repetition, particularly towards the end or in the final paragraph.

The first of the two topics, **Question 2(a)**, was answered well. Very often it took the form of an argument in favour of modern technology, transport and medicine. While these arguments were somewhat stereotypical, there was much difference in the ways in which they were developed and expressed. In most cases there was a good deal of contrast between a *previous historical period* and the present day. The period was not always specified and was often left to the guesswork of the Examiner.

The Examiner's task was made difficult by the lack of historical knowledge that was demonstrated. Subject knowledge was not a matter for marking an English composition, but sometimes the argument was strongly affected by attitudes towards both the present and the past. The past was often portrayed nostalgically by those who found the present age too busy and noisy. People in the past lived idyllic lives and there was often no understanding of the hardships that ordinary people faced. Supporters of the present age frequently portrayed it as comfortable, peaceful and generally luxurious without any acknowledgment of the horrors that go on daily worldwide.

Question 2(b) required a little more thought but was also often answered well and with some originality. For example, there were occasional answers based on the history of women's movements and some good considerations of mass demonstrations and revolutions. There was much discussion of global warming and recycling. Some answers tackled the balance between the power of ordinary people and those who were in charge. The best answers were those that used specific examples. It was more difficult to sustain abstract ideas, which tended to become either confused or repetitious.

For writing, the highest marks were given for clarity of expression, and this was helped by the judicious use of a wide range of specific vocabulary. It was generally better to write in formal English for both the topics, but it was, of course, in order to write in the first person.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure you have a variety of ideas at your disposal.
- Build them into a linked structure.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader's attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

(a) You arrive on an island. Write a description of your first impressions of the place and its people.

[25 marks]

OR

(b) Describe what you see and hear from a hiding place.

[25 marks]

The quality of descriptive writing continued to improve. It was clear that much work had gone into teaching the necessary techniques. There was evidence of confidence in tackling both topics. Most answers covered a short time scale and limited any events to one or perhaps two, so that there was no confusion with a narrative. Most of the writing was expressed in adventurous vocabulary, although there were examples of words that were used inaccurately and language that was over-ambitious and which impeded communication.

The best answers created an overall picture that was clear in the reader's mind and sounded realistic. Some of the writing for **Question 3(a)** was stereotypical, so that one could imagine several people writing the same description. For example, the sea was frequently *turquoise* and had glittering jewels to make it shine. The sand *tickled* the feet or *sifted through the toes*. The line of trees was like a bank. Finally, the word *engulfed* appeared with varying success in many of the descriptions. Better answers were more unusual, and it was clear that some of them were actual places that had made a strong impression. They had a touch of originality that engaged the reader.

Often, the accounts of the islands improved in the second part, the descriptions of the people. These were often colourful and gave details of clothes and facial expressions, hair and various things that they carried. It was possible to achieve differentiation for content in this second part of the writing. In a few cases, the people were omitted.

Question 3(b) was well answered and a number of the accounts were very realistic. The hiding places themselves were well described even when they were stereotypical. For instance many of them were wardrobes belonging to a parent. The persons hiding found themselves in contact with various clothes and there was usually a crack that let a sliver of light in. The best part was nearly always the appearance of some other person who was looking for the protagonist. A great deal of imagination was evident, and the accounts of hide and seek were very well done. Some of the seekers were much more ominous and description was well used to provide tension.

Some care was necessary in writing descriptions. Many of the style marks were for the use of language, but candidates should check their work for accuracy. There were errors where the present tense was correctly used but not sustained. There were still some cases of writing sentences that had no finite verb and there were more sentence separation errors than in the answers to **Question 2**.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Do not write a static description. Allow for a little movement and a short time span.
- Do not confuse a description with a story.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

Question 4: Narrative writing

(a) You witness an incident which you are forced to get involved in. Use this idea as the basis for a narrative.

[25 marks]

OR

(b) Write a story based on an animal that escapes.

[25 marks]

As in previous sessions, there was a difference between stories that were based on an imaginative idea and stories that consisted of unengaging events, often strung together with little convincing detail. It is recommended that candidates should study some short stories to learn how writers introduce their characters and settings, build up the interest in the narrative and manage the climax. Many stories started well, but were weak at the end.

The stories that were written in answer to **Question 4(a)** were quite successful, although some wrote a simple series of unconvincing events. However, many answers were more complex than that. There was

the story of the person who almost unwittingly became a part of a violent group of teenagers and found that he was blamed for the trouble. This was an idea that occurred quite frequently and was handled well, sometimes with bitter irony. Another idea was to find someone seriously in need of assistance and try to convince oneself that one could look the other way. An example of this was of someone who entered a burning house against his will to try to rescue some children. A third idea was to try and save someone who died because of the delay while the storyteller summoned up enough courage. These stories were complex in the sense that the issue was never clear cut, and the best answers gave a realistic account of the thoughts and emotions that passed through the mind.

Question 4(b) was best answered where the story was told from the viewpoint of the animal itself. One answer was about an elephant which, with unusual violence, opened the door to its cage and found that it could escape. Much of the narrative was taken up with the flood of doubts that came to its mind as it realised that it was free. This story was convincing, as was the love hate relationship between the parrot and its teenage owner that led to its eventual escape and immediate death when it entered an unknown and hostile environment. Other stories concerned humans who came face to face with dangerous animals. These were quite well written although one about a rattlesnake showed little understanding of how the snake might behave.

The writing marks were sometimes dependent on the quality of the language used. It was important that narratives, although different in the formation of the plot from descriptions, should nevertheless contain descriptive detail in order to appear realistic and to engage the reader. Some stories were written in everyday prose that made them more like newspaper reports. Examiners also rewarded fluent and well formed sentences and expected them to be appropriately punctuated.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the story.
- Do not try to write a story with too long a time span.
- You can improve a story by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.
- Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic.
- If you write more than you expected, make sure you do not get careless at the end of the story.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/32

Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**. The requirements for doing well were to:

- write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience
- structure each answer overall and to sequence sentences in well-formed individual paragraphs
- create credible and effective arguments and to write descriptions and stories that are realistic, original and engaging in their content
- write in a variety of well-formed sentence types, including complex sentences
- use a wide range of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

General comments

This paper was frequently well answered. The writing was often lively and there was an awareness of the band descriptors set by the mark scheme, where the band descriptors generally remain the same from session to session.

The amount of reading set for **Question 1** was slightly shorter than in previous sessions and this had the advantage that a reasonable number of ideas and opinions were included in the passage and that it was easier for candidates to concentrate on them. Generally, candidates did not simply copy from the passage which would have meant loss of marks, although there were some instances where candidates felt it was easier to reiterate phrases from the original interview. The more original the language that was used, the more the responses revealed an ability to write well.

In the composition section the number of responses to **Question 3(a)** and **(b)**, the descriptions, continued to increase. Some responses, particularly those on visiting a theme park or fairground, were accounts and lists rather than framing the content in a short time span.

There was an increase in the standard of argumentative and discursive writing as more responses were structured and use was made of personal knowledge and opinions in both topics.

The narratives continued to exhibit the strengths and weaknesses that have been given in previous reports.

The best compositions were always the most original. Some of the answers to each of the topics were stereotypical. Responses that went through the motions in this manner rarely showed any excitement and involvement on the part of the writer. The Examiners were always ready to credit unusual and interesting approaches.

The guide of one and a half to two sides for answers to **Question 1** indicated a length that was sufficient for the award of full marks if the quality of the reading and writing was high enough. Most responses did well to encapsulate pertinent development of clear ideas within this length, but there were times when arguments were revisited and essays became repetitive, therefore it was not always the case that extra length, which was sometimes difficult to sustain, attracted extra marks. Generally, the writing, in all three genres, often became more careless as time ran out. There were however, no automatic penalties for exceeding the suggested length.

There was evidence that Centres encouraged handwriting that was neat and of a reasonable size. Very few scripts were untidy or hastily written.

There was a good deal of accuracy of writing from many Centres. However, despite evidence of competence, in some cases the writing still contained many errors, often of punctuation. The commonest error was the failure to use full stops to separate sentences or commas to separate units within sentences. Apostrophes were commonly wrong. In descriptive and narrative writing unjustified changes of tense were common. There were also some examples of general weakness of errors with verb use; missing articles and mixed word order.

Comments on individual questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: Read the following transcript of a radio broadcast in which Mr Sandip Patel, who campaigns against the use of cell phones, gives his views on the topic. Write a letter to Mr Patel in which you comment on his views on the use of cell phones. In your letter you should: examine the points Mr Patel makes, examine the ideas raised by the interviewer, and give your own view and develop your arguments. Begin your letter, 'Dear Mr Patel...'. Base your letter on the ideas found in the transcript and be careful to use your own words.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

A good deal of interest was shown in the content of this transcript, which was deliberately quite opinionated and provocative to young people well acquainted with modern technology. It also offered many possibilities for an evaluation of the ideas and opinions that were put forward by both speakers.

Most of the answers were strongly in favour of the interviewer who offered positives arguments for the use of cell phones. However, occasionally, in their attempt to develop and support the interviewer's opinions and show their own knowledge of technology, candidates moved too far from the material and began to write their own discursive essay on the topic of cell phones. No extra credit was given for expressing views on one side rather than the other. Some letters that followed the content of the transcript closely and did not express a firm view were less effective.

The marks for reading

The first and second bullet required candidates to *examine* reasons and not to state or to paraphrase them. The word *examine* tied in with the requirement in Band 1 of the mark scheme to make a *thorough, perceptive, convincing evaluation of ideas and comments in the broadcast*. The best of the letters commented on various major ideas and developed them in a way that was both relevant to the tone of the interview and that represented personal thought. Answers were rewarded when they evaluated what was said, perhaps differentiating between fact and opinion and identifying arguments that were inconsistent. The mark scheme for Band 2 also specified evaluation and development of the ideas in the passage, but did not require this to be so consistent. Band 1 answers presented a firm argument and integrated the content rather than using the passage to support it.

It was the third bullet that prompted candidates to take a stance on the issue. Although this was mostly done in the final paragraph of the letter, *giving your own view and developing your arguments* formed the basis of the best of the letters.

Many letters were clear in their stance and took the side of the interviewer, but they also were thorough in their analysis of Mr Patel's views and acknowledged that there were quite a few issues raised by him that merited consideration. Responses with an integrated and assured evaluation as well as reordering of the passage achieved marks as high as top Band 2 or 1. Some responses were very detailed and showed that the transcript had been well read and understood, although many candidates, in an attempt not to miss out any arguments, adhered to a rather rigid format of firstly covering all Mr Patel's views, then referring to the interviewer's views and only in the final paragraph(s) did they cite their own opinions which were typical of the Band 3 marks of 5 and 6. These were written in original language and the best were just beyond paraphrase. Although they *missed opportunities to develop content relevantly or at length* (Band 3), they used the material thoroughly and were given marks as high as seven.

The lowest marks for reading were for letters that needed to use more of the reading material. Some letters could have developed more than one or two ideas from the passage, which would have prevented them from being repetitive or straying away from the content. Others repeated the material very literally. However, in

most cases, there was sufficient understanding of the topic and a reaction to the arguments put forward against the use of cell phones to elicit some personal viewpoint and nudge the reading mark into Band 3.

The marks for writing

The best writing presented the argument in fluent and persuasive language. It was also structured in the best form for the letter as distinct from copying the sequence of the transcript. The most effective scripts were those that integrated the three ideas suggested by the three bullets. However, most responses were divided up into the three sections that followed the sequence given in the question paper. Most answers had some sense of structure and only a few drifted from idea to idea. Some answers, in the middle range, offered a straightforward match between the two views – road deaths versus emergencies, spelling versus safety, for example – and some made a sensible judgement of their own about which factors were more important or how the disadvantages could be mitigated. Such an approach was not as simple as it might seem because a proper re-ordering of the passage and attentive reading was required to find some of the counter arguments in the original.

Examiners looked for effective use of the language of evaluation and argument, and the best writing was frequently that which had a strong voice; often that of a teenager or a parent. This approach allowed them to write with some authority on children's safety and, in some cases, to tackle the underlying issues in the passage such as obsession or bad manners. However, quite often letters overdid the strength of expression and sacrificed argument for bombast. Less effective writing was more factual in that it reported the content or, in contrast, stayed too close to the generalisations put forward by Mr Patel.

The accuracy and style of this exercise was sometimes better than that of the composition. This may have been because it was the first question to be answered. However, to a certain extent, the language of the answer was given a sense of direction and style by the language of the original. This sometimes led to rather straightforward, unadventurous writing or, in certain cases, rather reactionary writing that required a more formal style in a personal address to Mr Patel. Copying of the passage impeded originality of expression in the letters.

The overall marks for this question were frequently very similar to those given for the composition.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure that you select ideas and opinions from the reading material and evaluate them in relation to the context of the task.
- Especially look for arguments that are inconsistent and be aware of the difference between fact and opinion.
- Always use your own words. Never copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage.
- Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully of how you present an article or a letter, for example.
- Write with a voice. Think of who your reader is and express your point of view firmly.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **Most people prefer to live in their own country, but some want to emigrate to another country. Say where you would like to live and explain your reasons.** [25 marks]

OR

- (b) **'It's best to be an adult. Adults have everything their own way.' Argue for or against this statement.** [25 marks]

There was some interesting writing in this section, with a clear sense of audience and an attempt at stylistic arguments. However, it is important to remind Centres that candidates need to provide a convincing structure to their work to achieve well in for this type of question.

The best answers were those that contained a wide selection of ideas and developed each one of them at a satisfying length. They had an overall shape, so that the reader did not feel that content was arranged in a random order. Different parts of the whole were treated with similar importance. The arguments could be followed and the sequences avoided repetition.

Average responses contained some good ideas but were less consistent. Some started well but the quality of the content waned as the writing continued. There was frequent repetition, particularly towards the end or in the final paragraph.

The first of the two topics, **Question 2(a)**, was answered in two ways. Very often candidates needed to pay more attention to the first part of the question in favour of highlighting the good aspects of staying in one's country of origin. This led to a more informative response rather than an initial consideration why people might choose to venture from their homeland as referred to in the question.

Examiners rewarded candidates who took a discursive stance in their decision to remain in one's own country rather than simply listing what was good about the land of their birth. Many candidates who had already moved from their own countries to benefit their education wrote movingly on the pitfalls of living in a foreign country away from their families. Others wrote about wars and conflicts that had driven their families out of their home countries and again these were often touchingly personal, but more importantly they contained a clear discursive approach as they weighed up the positive and negative elements of this question.

Question 2(b) provided some very good responses and showed a clearer sense of audience by enveloping their views with what teenagers often feel on the topic: they can not wait to grow up, have the freedom to do what their parents would not let them do, have their views respected and so on. The body of the response then carefully tracked the reasons why this view was immature since adults have responsibilities and worries which do not hamper teenagers. These included jobs, making money, family and often the fear of making bad decisions or behaving badly without the luxury of parents to hide behind. It was striking how few candidates looked forward to becoming adults and most felt that adults' responsibilities weighed heavily on their shoulders.

There was a maturity of voice and style adopted in the responses to this question. Both the content and structure of essays as well as the style and accuracy was often successful because candidates were writing about something of which they had a profound knowledge.

For writing, the highest marks were given for clarity of expression, and this was helped by the judicious use of a wide range of specific vocabulary. It was generally better to write in formal English for both the topics, but it was, of course, in order to write in the first person.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure you have a variety of ideas at your disposal.
- Build them into a linked structure.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader's attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

(a) Describe the scene and atmosphere when you visit a theme park or fairground. [25 marks]

OR

(b) Describe your surroundings before and after a sudden change in the weather. [25 marks]

The quality of descriptive writing varied. It was clear that candidates tried hard to include a range of sensory details within a limited time-span, but too often these relied heavily on a narrative framework. The sense of immediacy or of being in the situation proved illusive in many answers. In responses to both tasks, there needed to be greater balance in the writing. There was no need for an overlong introduction or explanatory ending. Candidates often provided details, but relied on a series of points on what was seen or heard rather than real attempts to evoke atmosphere, create images or provide feelings of excitement or fear.

The best answers for **Question 3(a)** created an overall picture that was clear in the reader's mind and sounded realistic. Better answers had young people sneaking into theme parks when they were closed; one went at night, and another visited a derelict park. These were much more focused, and both managed to create and sustain powerful atmospheres. Originality and thinking creatively tended to place the writer immediately in the picture and this was heightened by the required maturity of vocabulary and language to paint the scene. Some of the writing was stereotypical, so much so that one could imagine several people writing the same description. For example, everyone entered the theme park in the morning, consumed quantities of hamburgers and candy floss, went on lots of rides and emerged in the evening.

Often, the accounts of the rides themselves improved the writing as the focus was on movement: people's faces contorted in fear and enjoyment; hair swirling and candy floss flying in the rush of air; screams ebbing and increasing. The time-frame became the experience itself, not the trip to and from the fairground, and this is what made the best accounts more realistic and believable.

For Question 3(b) thunderstorms and floods featured often; sometimes an overnight snowfall enveloped the landscape. Successful descriptions gave a clear contrast between the before and after without resorting to an outline of saying, for example, 'good night', going upstairs, but by being urged to look outside at the familiarity of their surroundings by the sound of a dog barking or a car backfiring. The scene was then clearly set for the immediacy of change later in these descriptions outside the home. Elsewhere, sunny, hot beach scenes worked well, in which the sudden storm resulted in people scurrying for cover, parents anxiously scooping up squealing children, the ominous darkness of the sky engulfing everyone until lightning bolts illuminated crying babies' faces and excited boys counted down to the next whiplash of light. One response described a child's concentration while building a sandcastle, only to watch it swept away by the torrential rain as he was tugged to safety. It was this attention to individuals' experience, to the minutia, that formed the clearest images in these essays.

Another element that required attention in responses was a necessity to identify sensations. Whilst it was easy to name sensations of heat, sweat, cold, shivering, terror and so on, the physical manifestations of these, from scalp prickling to trickling, goose bumps to an inability to move are aspects that show the reader what is being felt. It is the usual 'show, don't tell' advice that is generally well known.

Some care was necessary in writing descriptions. Many of the style marks were for the use of language, but there were errors where the present tense was correctly used but not sustained. There were still some cases of writing sentences that had no finite verb and there were more sentence separation errors than in the answers to **Question 2**.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Do not write a static description. Allow for a little movement and a short time span.
- Do not confuse a description with a story.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

Question 4: Narrative writing

(a) **Write a story that begins with these words: 'Finally, the great day dawned.'** [25 marks]

OR

(b) **You wake up, look out of your window, and discover that something has happened during the night which has totally changed the area around your house. Write about what happens.** [25 marks]

As in previous sessions, there was a difference between stories that were based on an imaginative idea and stories that consisted of unengaging events, often strung together with little convincing detail. It is recommended that candidates should study some short stories to learn how writers introduce their

characters and settings, build up the interest in the narrative and manage the climax. Many stories started well, but were weak at the end.

The stories that were written in answer to **Question 4(a)** were varied and quite successful. The opening sentence suggested a particular narrative structure which candidates mostly used, going back over the events which had led up to the great day and, in some good responses, picking up the story at that point and carrying it forward. The narrative's success often depended on the content chosen. Straightforward accounts of exams, dates and sports events, in which there was some build up of anticipation, predominated. Better responses involved more complex material such as unforeseen obstacles on the way, for example, the case of one candidate who described moving away from home to go to School for the first time and his mounting fear was exacerbated by a delay caused by a faulty airplane. Another candidate described a prisoner released from years in jail, but when he finally arrived home his family hardly remembered him. Other twists in the tale proved effective and showed a strong sense of planning and forethought. The most effective scripts managed to organise details of place, time and character so that the tension was released slowly at first and then gradually ratcheted to the point where the reader understood the significance of the event at the end.

For Question 4(b), the most credible and realistic narratives provided the best reading: longed for rainfall after a drought, snow covering a land that has never witnessed such a phenomenon before or, in one case, a plague of frogs that had to be dealt with before normal life could be resumed. This question, generally, was answered less well than **Question 4(a)**, mainly due to the fact that candidates rarely provided a believable scenario for the changed landscape outside their house. Scenes of devastation were difficult to account for credibly as bombs dropped imperceptibly and many answers provided a mix of science-fiction and fantasy as zombies and aliens featured heavily. Planning was often required in responses to this topic.

The writing marks were sometimes dependent on the quality of the language used. It was important that narratives, although different in the formation of the plot from descriptions, should nevertheless contain descriptive detail in order to appear realistic and to engage the reader. Some stories were written in everyday prose that made them more like newspaper reports. Examiners also rewarded fluent and well formed sentences and expected them to be appropriately punctuated.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the story.
- Do not try to write a story with too long a time span.
- You can improve a story by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.
- Originality is important. Try to think of unusual approaches to your topic.
- If you write more than you expected, make sure you do not get careless at the end of the story.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/33

Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

This paper was mainly assessed for writing, although there were ten marks available for reading in **Question 1**.

The requirements for doing well were:

- in **Question 1**, to write with a specific audience in mind and to adapt content and style to that audience
- to structure each answer and to sequence sentences within well-formed individual paragraphs
- to create credible and effective arguments and to write descriptions and stories that are realistic, original and engaging in their content
- to write in a variety of controlled sentence types, including complex sentences
- to use a wide range of effective and appropriate vocabulary.

General comments

This paper was frequently well answered. The writing was often engaging and showed awareness of the features of good responses which are shown in the grade descriptors of the mark scheme. These band descriptors generally remain the same from session to session.

The reading passage set for **Question 1** presented points on both sides of the argument about modern technology in a straightforward way, although there were more subtle inferences which some responses used to good effect. There was relatively little copying of parts of the passage which would limit the marks available for both reading and writing.

In the composition section, the descriptive tasks proved popular and responses were often effectively detailed and most avoided a narrative structure. **Question 3(a)** was more often chosen and better answered, whereas **Question 3(b)** responses were more likely to be narrative-driven and lacking detailed content.

The argumentative questions were well-answered on the whole, with relevant and often interesting observations in both questions. Candidates often made effective use of their own experience of social networking sites or education settings to inform their answers

The narratives continued to exhibit the strengths and weaknesses that have been given in previous reports.

The best compositions were always the most original. Some of the answers to each of the topics were stereotypical or predictable, especially in the narrative writing. Responses that went through the motions in this manner rarely showed any excitement and involvement on the part of the writer. Unusual or interesting approaches were better rewarded for content.

The guide of one and a half to two sides for answers to **Question 1** indicated a length that was sufficient for the award of full marks if the quality of the reading and writing was high enough. A succinct grasp of the issues raised in the passage will often show a better understanding than a long, often repetitious retelling of it. Some responses were four or five sides long and this was also true of some of the compositions. When narratives and descriptions, in particular, became over-long, there was a tendency for the quality and control of the language to deteriorate.

There were many scripts which showed a high level of accuracy and skill with language. However, despite evidence of competence in structuring responses, in some cases the writing still contained many errors,

often of punctuation. The commonest error was the failure to use full stops to separate sentences or commas to separate units within sentences. Apostrophes were commonly wrong. In descriptive and narrative writing unjustified changes of tense were common. There were many examples of using 'also' and 'and' to begin sentences. Expressions such as 'in front' and 'even though', which should be written as two words, were often given as one.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: Read the following discussion and consider the views of both the teacher and her candidates. Imagine you are one of the candidates involved in the discussion. Write an article for your school magazine about how people use modern technology. In your article you should: examine issues about family and social life, examine issues about health and safety and give your own view and develop your arguments. Begin your magazine article on the ideas found in the discussion and be careful to use your own words.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the understanding and use of the content in the passage.

Many candidates recognised the generational differences highlighted in the passage regarding the use of modern technology and were able to use the bullet points to structure their answers. Some relied on the sequence of the passage, rather than the bullet points, and created less focused and developed arguments as a result. The third bullet point required candidates to develop their own point of view on the topic and most gave reasonable ideas about the need to moderate and balance the use of technology with those of the family and the wider society.

The marks for reading

The first and second bullet required candidates to *examine* reasons and not to state or to paraphrase them. The word *examine* tied in with the requirement in Band 1 of the mark scheme to *make a thorough, perceptive, convincing evaluation of the ideas in the interview*. The best answers were characterised by a sound overview of the issues raised in the passage, such as the different attitudes of older and younger people and the ways in which technology has affected family life. Candidates evaluated the ideas in the passage rather than reordering and reiterating them, often arguing that younger people had simply found new ways to do things which people have always done. Sustained responses using this kind of evaluative approach were awarded marks of 8, 9 or 10, depending on the thoroughness of their answers.

It was the third bullet that prompted candidates to take a stance on the issue. Although this was mostly done in the final paragraph of the letter, a willingness to develop a clear position on the issues was often the basis of a strong response, particularly where the views given were properly anchored in an overview of the passage.

Where candidates were more hesitant in developing their own point of view, nevertheless there was often evidence of a thorough, close reading of the passage. Many were able to locate the details in the passage needed to address each bullet point and render the content in their own language. Although they *missed opportunities to develop content relevantly or at length* (Band 3), they used the material thoroughly and were given marks as high as seven. However, the Band 3 marks of 5 and 6 were more typical of this use of the content.

The lowest marks for reading were for articles that used little of the reading material. Some candidates focused on one or two ideas, such as the effects of computer games on young people, or were repetitive or strayed away from the passage. Others repeated the material literally, often without reordering the sequence, which showed only a limited grasp of the arguments. Phrases such as 'in his own bubble', 'zoning out' and 'oblivious to the traffic' were often copied and in weaker responses, longer phrases and complete sentences appeared, most frequently '...permanently hooked up to some gadget that stops them communicating with others.'

The marks for writing

The highest marks were given for responses which showed a clear sense of audience by adapting the language and style of the passage to that of a school magazine. This necessarily involved some confidence

in adopting a structure which was not defined by the sequence of the passage. Most high-scoring candidates used the bullet points successfully as a framework for their article, with some finding a convincing, often quite wry voice and style of their own which suited the young audience stipulated.

Weaker responses relied too heavily on the sequence and conversational style of the passage. Articles often ended with 'What do you think?' or some similar device which showed some awareness of the style required. In the middle range, the body of the article was often a straightforward report of the passage and did not always engage the reader as an article should.

Candidates given high marks for their compositions were often awarded similar marks for **Question 1**, but there was some divergence between the two marks in the middle range of overall scores. These candidates tended to score better in the composition but found the ideas in the passage, and its conversational style, difficult to adapt into an article.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure that you select ideas and opinions from the reading material and evaluate them.
- Consider how to group ideas together, rather than relying on the sequence in the passage.
- Always use your own words. Never copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage.
- Be aware of the genre you are using for your answer. Think carefully of how to present an article or a letter, for example.
- Think of who your reader is and express your point of view firmly.
- As always, end sentences with full stops, put commas in the right places and remember apostrophes.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **'Young people today do not have real friends. Long lists of names on social networking sites on the Internet have taken their place.' Discuss this statement.**

[25 marks]

OR

- (b) **Some people say that both girls and boys do better in single sex schools. What are your views?**

[25 marks]

The best answers were those that contained a wide selection of ideas and developed each one of them at a satisfying length. They had an overall shape, so that the reader did not feel that content was arranged in a random order. The quality and discussion of ideas was consistent throughout the piece. The arguments could be followed and the sequences avoided repetition.

Average responses contained some good ideas but were less consistent. Some started well but the quality of the content waned as the writing continued or there were one or two well-discussed points with some less convincing ideas added on. There was frequent repetition, especially in the final paragraph where ideas were revisited in a fairly simple way or reiterated.

Question 2(a) was handled well by most candidates who chose it. Some addressed the real heart of the issue and wrote about the nature of friendship and how it had been changed by social networking sites. There were some strong arguments that such sites augmented and enhanced friendships, as well as revived lapsed ones. Others agreed with the angle suggested by the question, giving examples of the competitive 'listing' of friends with whom there was minimal real contact. No weight was given in the marks to either point of view, since the quality of argument was the key aspect for awarding marks here.

Many candidates gave clear opinions on the issue but weaker responses tended to run out of material after making some salient points. A few wandered off the main topic onto cyber-bullying or gaming. These points could perhaps have formed part of a relevant argument but were often not really tied into a clear point of view or were allowed to over-balance more directly relevant points.

Question 2(b) was similarly tackled by candidates. Most offered sensible, straightforward ideas about how boys and girls fared in single-sex and co-educational schools. Both boys and girls were seen by some as easily distracted by each other and prone to compete in different but equally unhelpful ways for attention from the opposite sex. Some candidates saw single-sex schools as better because they allowed boys more

focus on sport, or because the curriculum could be adapted to include subjects more suited to a particular sex. While many offered these rather stereotypical ideas without evaluation, better responses acknowledged that they were generalisations and some questioned their validity as such.

Better responses also tended to discuss different learning styles associated with boys and girls as well as the wider aims of education which included social skills and discussed how these were better accommodated in co-educational settings. Effective use was also made of personal experience, either comparing different schools attended or comparing the experiences of different school candidates. As always, these anecdotal references added interest and particularity to the arguments.

Responses were mostly well-structured with consideration of the benefits and disadvantages of single-sex schools with a concluding paragraph which settled on one side of the argument. In average responses, these paragraphs were often weaker than the rest of the piece and gave a straightforward opinion, whereas better responses offered a reasoned argument in which a clear point of view emerged.

For style and accuracy, the highest marks were given for clarity of expression, and this was helped by the judicious use of a wide range of specific vocabulary. In a few cases, there was evidence of relevant content but the expression was imprecise and the style was unable to carry the meaning of more complex ideas. It was generally better to write in formal English for both the topics, although the use of first person was, of course, perfectly acceptable.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Make sure you have a variety of ideas at your disposal and decide what your point of view on the topic is before embarking on the essay.
- Build your ideas into an argument in which paragraphs are linked together.
- Develop each idea at sufficient length and sequence your sentences.
- Try to avoid writing abstractly and use specific examples to engage your reader's attention.
- Use clear and precise English.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

(a) Describe a restful place.

[25 marks]

OR

(b) Describe an alien's first impressions of a town centre known to you.

[25 marks]

Question 3(a) was more often chosen than **Question 3(b)** and most of the candidates who scored highly on the paper as a whole selected descriptive writing for their composition. These candidates showed a clear understanding of how to write descriptively and were well-practised and confident in using language to create atmosphere.

The restful places described in **Question 3(a)** were most often in secluded, outdoor surroundings and these scenarios gave candidates plenty of natural details on which to focus their attention, as well as the emotions of the narrator. Gardens, quiet beaches or woodland areas made better subjects for description than candidates' own bedrooms because there was more scope for using details to evoke the restfulness required by the question. Better responses moved easily between concrete details, described with original imagery, and the effect the place had on the narrator. They also included some progress through time such as the setting of the sun or a change in the weather. While always controlled and never slipping into narrative, this short time span gave these accomplished descriptions cohesion and shape.

More average responses tended to rely on more stereotypical scenarios and the details were inevitably less well-realised as a result. The descriptions at this level were more static and sometimes recorded what was seen, heard, smelt and touched in a rather mechanical way. Candidates sometimes struggled with synonyms for 'restful' and some responses lacked variety both in detail and vocabulary. As is characteristic of weaker descriptions, responses were less well-structured and details were added more randomly rather than selected to create a particular atmosphere. These type of answers very rarely lapsed into narrative.

There were some ambitious responses to **Question 3(b)** which described familiar details in a fresh, often imaginative way, as was suggested by the question. The task invited candidates to look at their own town through the eyes of a narrator who took nothing for granted and some lively images were employed to

describe the townscape from this point of view: 'metal boxes' conveyed crowds of people and periodically 'spewed them out' and 'towering edifices' opened their mouths and 'swallowed' people, for example.

Weaker answers to this question were much more likely to become stories and some responses were entirely narrative from the outset. This approach made it difficult for candidates to include the level of descriptive detail required to reach the higher bands. The inclusion of an 'alien' in the title led to some unlikely tales of zombies and the like which relied on events rather than description and showed some lack of awareness of the nature and style of the paper.

Marks for style and accuracy reflected the range and precision of vocabulary and the extent to which candidates succeeded in evoking atmosphere. As mentioned above, candidates at the highest level employed a range of ambitious vocabulary, whereas weaker responses to **Question 3(a)** tended to revolve around different words for 'restful'. There were sentences without active verbs and some instances of tenses shifting between present and past although where candidates controlled their sentence structures and varied their vocabulary and imagery, some very high marks were achieved.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Do not write a static description. Allow for a little movement and a short time span.
- Do not confuse a description with a story.
- Try to make your description as real as possible. You should be able to see and hear what you write.
- It is good practice to write in the present tense, but do not change tense once you have started your writing.
- Write sentences with proper verbs. There are no special sentence structures for a description.
- Be especially careful to use full stops at the ends of sentences.

Question 4: Narrative writing

(a) **'While I was looking idly through my family's old box of documents, I suddenly came across an official letter.'** Imagine yourself as the narrator and continue this story.

[25 marks]

OR

(b) **Take an old tale or myth and retell it as though it is happening in your country at this time.**

[25 marks]

As in previous sessions, there was a difference between stories that were based on an imaginative idea and stories that consisted of unengaging events, often strung together with little convincing detail. It is recommended that candidates should study some short stories to learn how writers introduce their characters and settings, build up the interest in the narrative and manage the climax. Several narratives were based on the same basic idea but were handled with very different levels of skill, highlighting the importance of managing and shaping the story.

Many candidates who chose narrative writing for their compositions selected **Question 4(a)** and there were some similar ideas evident here. Letters found by the narrator often contained birth certificates which revealed previously unknown adoptions or twin siblings, scenarios which worked well in the hands of abler candidates. The discovery of the letter was preceded in better responses by effective scene-setting and characterisation – a bored, disaffected narrator was sometimes left alone in the house or in some cases the narrator was sent to the attic to find something more mundane, only to stumble upon the letter. Better responses built up the details effectively so as to provide a clear contrast between the atmosphere before and after the discovery of the letter. Narrators usually responded with shock and horror at the revelation contained in the letter and able candidates were able to describe these emotions effectively. Some responses ended at this point whereas others recounted the ensuing confrontations with parents. In both cases, stories often proved difficult to resolve and endings were generally weaker than the rest of the narratives. Where confrontations with parents were included, the conflict created by the discovery that the narrator was adopted or some similar calamity was sometimes unrealistically simple in resolution, although in some notable exceptions candidates managed to convey that things would never be the same for the narrator.

Weaker candidates tended to use the sentence in the question too literally as the beginning of their story and embarked peremptorily with little preparation of the scene and without establishing the character of the narrator. There was limited build-up so that the discovery of the letter lacked impact and candidates found it

difficult to resolve a story which began too abruptly. Marks for content and structure reflected these shortcomings and were sometimes lower than those for style and accuracy as a result.

For **Question 4(b)** the task required an awareness of the original story underlying the modern retelling. Such stories are usually strong narratives with a clear moral or sense of purpose. The response required a clearly structured, cohesive narrative set in a particular country as well as an accuracy and fluency of style to achieve high marks.

In Question **4(a)**, marks for style and accuracy sometimes depended on how effectively the candidate could describe the emotional impact of the discovery of the letter on the narrator, since this was the pivotal point of the narrative. Able candidates could provide a range of vocabulary and constructed different kinds of sentences to create effect. A reliance on recounting events in weaker responses made for a rather flat style which did not involve the reader with the narrator's feelings.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Remember that stories do not consist of events alone.
- Construct the story with the reader in mind – create the setting and characters as carefully as the plot.
- Include realistic details, description and the thoughts and feelings of characters in the story.
- Do not try to write a story with too long a time span.
- You can improve a story by using devices such as time lapses, flashbacks and two narrators.
- Make sure you use a wide range of appropriate language.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

In order to aim for high marks in this component, candidates should:

- ensure that the three assignments are written as different genres and in different styles appropriate to audience
- include assignments that reach the highest standard of which they are capable
- reflect in their writing their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of the world about them
- write in fluent and varied sentences separated by full stops
- proofread word-processed work carefully as marks may be deducted for typing errors.

General comments

The quality of the work was high and many Centres took the opportunities afforded by Coursework to develop and improve individuals' writing over the period of time available. The best writing reflected candidates' thoughts and feelings about topics that were close to their experience and interests. There were fewer research essays that said little about personal style and more about downloading from the Internet.

The choice of tasks was nearly always appropriate. Sometimes the choice of topic was left to the individual, but some teaching groups set the same tasks for everybody. There was no indication that one method resulted in better marks than the other. Where there was an individual choice of articles for the third assignment, it was important to monitor them since not all gave sufficient opportunities to meet the criteria for Bands 1 and 2 of the mark scheme for reading.

Some of the tasks were ones that have been set for many years. There were many essays set on topics such as euthanasia, and most of these looked very similar to each other and were generally lacking in vitality. Similarly there were still some Centres that set *The Assassin* for the second assignment. The Bhopal appeal also continued to appear. It is in the spirit of Coursework that Centres constantly look for assignments that are fresh, up-to-date and which inspire an imaginative and lively approach. IGCSE Examination questions are not tailor-made or particularly suitable for Coursework.

The main challenge remained the third assignment. While many Centres had worked hard to get this right there were still examples of articles that were too long or the wrong type to allow the evaluation and development of ideas and opinions.

Much of the work was accurate and well expressed. The commonest errors were of punctuation, particularly sentence separation, and these were not always corrected on the page. There were very many examples of errors of typing and it was evident that proofreading needed to take place.

The presentation of the work was good, though Centres are reminded that they should simply fix the assignments together firmly and not place them in plastic folders that are difficult to handle, or in heavy folders without the mark clearly shown on the outside. Apart from the cost of sending the folders to Cambridge, the Moderator has to be able to handle a considerable amount of paperwork with ease.

Administration

Most Centres took care to ensure that the marks on the CASF (Coursework Assessment Summary Form), the record of internal moderation, were the same as those on the MS1 mark sheets and also on the folders. There were examples where the wrong marks had been entered on the mark sheets and the individual folders had not been updated with changes to the marks. The Moderators were instructed to check these documents and where errors were discovered it involved extra, unavoidable work for Centres.

Assessment

Overall the quality of assessment at Centres was again good and the Moderators made small adjustments to bring all Centres into line with one another. The reasons for adjusting marks were similar to those reported in June 2010.

- Sometimes, too little account was taken of error, particularly sentence separation error where commas were used instead of full stops. Some final drafts were not corrected for errors and it was not clear whether the assessor had noticed them or not. Where standards in the Centre were particularly high, some of the marking was too severe for the frequency and nature of errors, particularly at the bottom of the mark range.
- Where several sets with different teachers were entered for the component, it was sometimes the case that one set was marked at a different standard from the others. The marks of one set might have been adjusted at internal moderation, but were still too severe or generous. Most internal moderation procedures were sound, and Centres nearly always succeeded in establishing one reliable rank order.
- The assessment of reading was sometimes generous in that too much credit was given to candidates who only summarised the reading material or who used it as a stimulus for their own creative writing. Sometimes the marking was severe where candidates limited themselves to a discussion of ideas and opinions expressed by the writer and developed their work in relevant and well sequenced paragraphs. There were indications that the mark scheme for awarding marks for reading needed to be consulted, and this matter is clarified in the section on Assignment 3 below.

Where there were small adjustments made for both reading and writing, these added up to more substantial final adjustments to the total marks.

Drafts

Only one early draft per folder was required. Centres that submitted more than one draft often made it difficult to identify the three pieces of work that were to be read. It was still comparatively rare to see drafts that showed evidence of substantial change. The best drafts had comments, perhaps with bullets, by the teacher at the end indicating the improvements that might be made. There was then evidence either in pen or another coloured type that changes had been made to the language (editing) or whole sections such as the ending (revising). This process showed critical awareness and the capacity to make progress in perfecting a piece of writing, which is one of the aims of Coursework.

Many of the drafts needed to demonstrate the opportunity to improve at this stage rather than to treat redrafting as the time to correct errors. There were cases, not often repeated through all the sets in a Centre, where a teacher had corrected the draft. This is not allowed. The advice given by the teacher must not constitute the correction. In some cases, the final draft repeated the errors that had been corrected by the teacher.

Comments on individual assignments

Assignment 1

In previous years, Centres have been encouraged to look beyond the writing of formal and research essays for this assignment. The use of websites has resulted in English style that is nearer to that of the Internet and that does not necessarily reflect the language of the writer, which is what Coursework seeks to encourage and develop. It has also been possible that work has been plagiarised from the Internet or so closely paraphrased that individual styles have been lost. Formal essays are often couched in very dry expression and lack the liveliness of a sixteen-year-old.

It was for this reason that Centres were encouraged to consider presenting topics such as *The dangers of smoking* or *Fossil fuels*, two examples from this session's folders, as the words of talks or speeches. In this

session, this continued to be a good way of expressing ideas. The balance between rhetoric and the development of ideas was always well achieved and the work was frequently persuasive and entertaining to read. It also seemed original and did not raise the question as to where the content came from.

Another successful way of tackling this assignment was to choose topics that were within the experience of the writers. For example, there were some good accounts of visits, such as to an art gallery, a museum or a restaurant. One Centre spent a week in Berlin, a very contrasting city from their own, and the contrast was well described. One Centre set a series of guides, such as to their School or a nearby town or to horse riding, and this allowed writing from slightly unusual angles. There were a number of letters and articles on topics such as coeducational Schools, changes to the life and rules of the School, parents and curfews, freedom for teenagers and home Schooling.

Where the writing was recognisably an essay, it was interesting how over time the topics that used to be chosen had changed. The choice had moved on to topics such as the dangers of the Internet, Facebook, video games, reality shows, letters to McDonalds, and Supersize Me. No doubt in a year or two new topics will have taken their place as popular issues. Euthanasia, the death penalty, abortion, the legalisation of drugs and capital punishment may still be issues, but they produced in almost every case some stereotypical writing which could have been livelier.

Room 101 is an old favourite and produced some good writing. So did *A life in the day of...* It is worth mentioning that most examples of the original newspaper versions are not particularly well structured or written in complex language, and it sometimes proved difficult to reach a Band 1 standard when using this assignment. The outstanding choice was a letter, supposedly written to a rich aunt from a child in a family hit by poverty, appealing for a share of the inheritance. It was most original and very moving to read.

Assignment 2

There were no specific concerns raised from the moderation of this assignment.

The choice was between fiction, description of places and autobiographical fragments, all of which were equally good options.

Teaching what makes a good narrative before letting any experimentation to take place proved to be good practice. Stories were well developed and were rarely series of events. There was plenty of description and a good deal of tension. Much attention was paid to the climax of the story and there were some effective endings. This was another advantage of Coursework, since in the examination there is rarely enough time to work out all the constituent parts of an effective narrative. A number of these narratives were mystery or ghost stories, and here the challenge was to make them sound real and to avoid stereotypes.

Some of the narratives were excessively violent and there remains a preponderance of war stories from the past. It is sometimes good to think of the possibilities of portraying life as happy, wholesome and perhaps amusing.

Some promising titles were *Face of my fear*, *The voice in my head*, *Friday the 23rd*, *Just in the nick of time*, *The door in the wall* and *I am a pea*. This last story was on the subject of anorexia and was well worth reading.

There were some good descriptions, the best of them involving some movement and some short passage of time. Static descriptions were difficult to sustain. Some descriptions were too long and the complex vocabulary was not necessarily a pleasure for the reader. There were some double descriptions, such as the main road described by day and by night and a scene before an after a disaster. More than one Centre set this type of assignment. Otherwise in this category there were some good descriptions of markets and souks, seaside scenes and a very good description of rain that started with the words *This is nature's Blitzkrieg*.

Finally there were autobiographical fragments. These were often very effective because they were singularly original and included some heartfelt thought and feelings. There were the usual account of births, illnesses and deaths, some of them rather traumatic to read, but also topics such as *Climbing in China* and *Crossing China* and *Skiing in Canada*. There were some good accounts of weddings and a well-written *Filipino Christmas*.

Assignment 3

Since this assignment was first set some years ago it has become clear what advice is useful to Centres. Previous reports have given detailed advice on the choice of texts for the reading part of the assignment and much of this advice has now been taken. It can now be summarised as follows:

- Choose an article that contains ideas and opinions that can be argued with, evaluated and developed. For example the article may use inconsistent arguments or confuse fact and opinion.
- Do not choose a long article of more than two sides and do not choose more than two articles if you are looking for contrasts. The reason for this is that it becomes difficult to evaluate too much material and the response is often too general or rarely specific.
- Do not choose whole novels or newspaper reports (or other purely factual material).

There were examples of articles without enough argument for effective engagement or where the topic was so worthy that it was impossible to argue with it. The response was therefore little more than a summary and the reading mark could not be more than average.

Some effective choices of stimulus texts were:

A strong attack of Facebook (by Janet Street Porter)

Stuff the Tiger by Jeremy Clarkson (against conservation, which produced some angry responses)

Goal line technology (for football fans)

Airbrushing photos of celebrities

Underworked Americans (arguing that American work ethics were poor)

Sex bias in the Girl Guides.

Advertisements are only recommended when there is enough reading matter.

Political speeches, such as those of Mandela or Martin Luther King, should not contain ideas which are too general and are not too long (*I have a dream* is too long).

Those who scored high marks for reading engaged with arguments, evaluated them and developed them. They wrote integrated responses and did not go through the passage point by point writing short and incomplete paragraphs. Frequently their writing was strongly expressed in effective language and was sometimes the best writing in the folder.

Those who provided little extension to ideas in the passage but who identified and summarised them in their own words scored five or six marks.

Those who used little material from the passage and who wrote their own ideas on the topic, using the passage as a stimulus, scored three or four marks.

Some of the marking of reading was inaccurate and there was evidence that the mark scheme had not been used. The mark scheme is in the Appendix to the syllabus. It states that the award of nine or ten marks is for those who *analyse and evaluate several ideas and details from the text(s) and develop lines of thought*. Band 2 requires a response *in detail to ideas from the text(s), explaining them and expressing views on them with varying degrees of effectiveness*. Finally Band 3 (marks of five and six) is for those who *show some response to the ideas in the text(s) summarising them and giving simple views on them*.

Marks were often inflated in the top three bands, particularly giving marks of seven and eight to responses that only met the criteria for Band 3. In addition there was a mistaken understanding that marks could be given to responses that analysed literary devices and the effectiveness of words. This type of response is relevant to Paper 2, **Question 2**. This question however, is related to **Question 1** of Paper 3, which it follows closely.

As mentioned previously, this question often encouraged some excellent writing. The language was original and persuasive and was a welcome change to that of Assignment 1 where the approach was often formal.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

Key messages

- Work with candidates to choose topics which have a specific theme.
- Encourage candidates to make their presentations more lively, by perhaps incorporating role play, but certainly by relying less on reciting factual information.
- Please restrict Part 1 to 4½ minutes – as specified in the syllabus. This session saw some much longer presentations.

General comments

Many candidates who successfully completed this component clearly prepared well in advance, conducted appropriate research, and were very adept at making presentations.

Comments on individual aspects of the test

Part 1 - The Individual Task

The most common format remains the fact-based informative ‘talk’ or presentation. Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches, which is to be encouraged – monologues, dramatic performances and role playing media/news/documentary reports, for example – these are still very rare. In this session, there were some candidates who presented various approaches to the interpretations of poetry which were very lively and entertaining. There was also evidence of more candidates using visual aids and props to enhance their presentations – an effort clearly to liven up their talks. Centres and candidates are of course able to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations.

Part 2 - Discussions

Examiners were very much part of the discussions, entering into the spirit of the occasion and the conversations were generally productive extensions of the Individual Tasks. It was clear in many cases that candidates had planned for further discussion.

Choice of topics

Here there was a similar approach to previous sessions to the choice of topics. Successful choices of topics included: the ugly side of music, the Rubik’s cube, the science behind first impressions, perceptions of the English, political scandals, decoding the art of lying, child soldiers, the pros and cons of online gaming, conscription, and why people stereotype. All of these allowed the candidate to enliven his or her presentation, and the Examiner to engage in fruitful and pertinent subsequent discussion.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very general topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. Some examples of topics this session which would have benefited from a more specific focus were: family, books, a country (e.g. China, England), fast food and fashion.

Assessment

Moderators noted increased leniency in awarding Band 1 marks for Part 1. In Part 2, Examiners generally placed candidates in the appropriate achievement band.

For Part 1, Centres are reminded that *lively delivery sustaining audience interest* is necessary and that a *wide range of language devices* should be present for Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, informative talk, which is perhaps 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 perhaps. Band 2 will indicate partial success of this aim.

For Part 2, we are 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 will 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 and take a more prominent role in the conversation.

Final comments

Moderators do enjoy listening to the sample recordings and recognise the amount of effort put in at many Centres by candidates and teachers in researching and presenting interesting and appropriate work.

We are grateful to have received the majority of samples on Compact Disc (CD). Moderators welcome this as it makes the task of external moderation quicker and more efficient. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended (as opposed to cassette recorders), as this tends to produce higher quality recordings, but also allows the easy transfer of an appropriately collated sample to be burned onto a single CD, using separate tracks.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/06

Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

Key messages

Centres are reminded that:

- three specific tasks which are different in approach should be conducted
- it is encouraged to be creative in the activities undertaken
- candidates are assessed for their skills in both speaking **and** listening
- only **Task 2** needs to be recorded and submitted, preferably using Compact Discs (CDs).

General comments

Most of the work presented for this session was appropriate and resulted in interesting speaking and listening activities which many of the candidates clearly enjoyed. Candidates and teachers worked together to design and implement a wide range of activities which illustrated the candidates' speaking and listening skills appropriately.

It was good to see the integration of literature into some of the activities – in many cases in an active and dramatic manner, with candidates role playing characters from novels and plays.

It was also good to see candidates being involved in choosing their own activities; this was most apparent with **Tasks 1** and **2**, where individual and paired work was required. Candidate-centred tasks are often the most rewarding and usually provide the best means of potential achievement as the candidates are highly motivated.

Comments on specific aspects

Centres are reminded that three specific tasks are required: an individual presentation, a paired activity and group work. Be careful that **Task 3** is not too similar in approach and content to **Task 2**. For example, if **Task 3** is a small group discussion, then try to make **Task 2** a lively role play between two candidates.

A wide variety of activities are encouraged – from creative 'authentic' role playing of real life situations, to activities which are drawn from literary texts, and large-group debates based on areas of contemporary interest. Teachers and candidates are encouraged to be as creative as possible in the activities undertaken for each task, ensuring of course that speaking **and** listening skills are demonstrated and are able to be assessed using the given criteria.

Centres who offered additional annotation (written on the Candidate Record Cards), accompanying each task/activity undertaken by each candidate, helped to make the process of external moderation swift and efficient. Many thanks for such full and explanatory notes relating to the work undertaken.

Assessment was applied by most Centres with a good deal of accuracy.

Please remember to send in the Candidate Record Cards – these are the only means by which the Moderator is made aware of all of the tasks/activities which have been undertaken at the Centre. It is useful if details relating to **each activity** are provided – indeed, it is permissible for the candidates to fill out these sections.

For the moderation process to be completed efficiently, Centres need only **submit recordings of the Task 2** (paired) activity. It is not necessary to record or send in recordings of group activities or talks/speeches from individual candidates (**Tasks 1** and **3**). We hope this enables easier management of the coursework and reduces the pressure on candidates and teachers alike.

It is not necessary to conduct the same activities within a Task for every candidate. For example, different pairs can engage in different pair-based activities.

Please ensure that some the activities which are conducted enable the higher level achievement criteria to be demonstrated. More capable candidates need to be challenged and need to be given the opportunity to display Band 1 attainment. It is therefore recommended that differentiated activities are designed by teachers and candidates.

We encourage sample work to be sent in using Compact Discs (CDs) – indeed, it is preferable for all of the candidate recordings in the sample to be collated onto a single CD. The use of modern, digital recording equipment is strongly recommended. It was good to see the majority of Centres this session using CDs to capture and present their samples.

