

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/11

Reading Passage (Core) 11

General comments

Overall, the passage about Efteling, the Dutch theme park, proved to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. Responses to the sub-questions in **Question 1** revealed that the main points in the article had been clearly understood and many candidates responded well to the more straightforward questions. However, a significant number of candidates were less successful than in previous sessions in their responses to **Questions 1(f)** and **1(h)**, which between them were worth nearly half the total marks available for the first section. The possible reasons for this will be considered in more detail later in this report, but the main concern expressed by Examiners was that many candidates simply did not read the questions sufficiently closely to be aware of the specific points that were being tested.

The standard of the responses to **Question 2**, the Writing task, was, in general, consistent with that of previous years and many candidates wrote full and engaging answers which revealed a secure understanding not only of both the passage and task but also of the audience for whom they were writing and of the persona which they were required to adopt. However, Examiners also reported that there were a number of candidates who either did little more than lift substantial passages from the original and present them in a unselective summary of what could be found in the park, without giving any clear evidence that the task had been fully understood, or who produced responses that were so perfunctory or written with little attention to accuracy and detail, that very little relevant information was conveyed at all. Overall, there was very little evidence that candidates were adversely affected by time pressures. Examiners have always reported positively on the commitment shown by candidates to this paper and on the seriousness of their approach.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The questions which focused on assessing candidates' ability to select, analyse and evaluate what is relevant to specific purposes, and to demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects, caused challenges for many candidates.

- (a) Most candidates correctly answered this straightforward question and stated that Efteling could be found in Holland or, equally acceptable, The Netherlands. A few incorrectly referred to the country's name as 'Dutch' and others somewhat over-complicated their response by stating that the park is 'set in the Brabant region near the Belgian border' without indicating in which country the Brabant region was situated.
- (b) This question required candidates to identify two words from the second paragraph which indicated that what could be seen from the boat was not real. Most candidates correctly quoted 'fictional' but fewer identified 'robotic'. The most common incorrect word chosen was 'exotic' – a word which many candidates appeared to have misunderstood as answers to **1(f)** indicated. Those who opted to quote the opening sentence of the paragraph in its entirety were not rewarded unless they clearly indicated the appropriate two words.
- (c) Most candidates gained one mark here by explaining that the purpose of the talking litter bins was to keep young children interested (while walking from one attraction to another). However, only a very small number of responses mentioned that a further, implied purpose was to encourage children to use the bins for depositing litter. Candidates are reminded that when a question such as this carries a two mark tally, it is more than likely that two relevant points will be required for a successful answer.

- (d) This question was generally well answered, with many candidates achieving both available marks. The effects of the roller coaster on the writer were that it left her feeling sick or with her stomach 'churning'; she was disorientated; her face was pale. Answers which said that she had a 'forced smile', without further explanation, were not credited as such comments did not convincingly indicate that it was the paleness rather than the smile that was the significant detail.
- (e) Again, most candidates responded well to this question, with only a small minority failing to gain at least two marks. It was pleasing to note that considerably more candidates managed to identify all four required points; some, however, failed to notice that the Dream Flight and the cable cars were one and the same thing and presented them as two discrete rides.
- (f) Unfortunately, this question was generally not well answered. The purpose of this question type is to specifically test the Assessment Objective to 'understand how writers achieve effects'. Consequently, the requirement was that candidates should identify words and phrases that, through the associations of the vocabulary and tone of voice used by the writer, suggested to the reader the unusual nature of the park. It was not enough, therefore, for candidates simply to list details of attractions in the park which might seem to be out of the ordinary.

The theme park features tableaux and attractions which are based on fairytale scenarios (for example, the forest, the Arabian town) and so, by its very nature, it contains features that are 'unusual'. However, what candidates were required to identify were not the features themselves but what there was in the writer's account of them that suggested that they were presented in an eccentric way. Thus, reference to a 'magic carpet' and a comment such as 'there aren't such things as magic carpets so it's unusual to see one' was not in itself sufficient to be rewarded with two marks as, in the fantasy world which the theme park presented, magic carpets would be perfectly acceptable features. However, reference to the 'creaky magic carpet' with a comment such as, 'unlike the conventional idea of a magic carpet which suggests something exciting and mysterious, in Efteling this would appear to be worn out and perhaps unsafe' would have conveyed a clear appreciation of the writer's choice of words. Similarly, reference to the Flying Pagoda was insufficient in itself, but an attempt to explain the force of the simile 'like a UFO' would have shown evidence of the ability to engage with the writer's language.

- (g) This question tested candidates' understanding of vocabulary and idiom; a pleasing number showed a general understanding that to 'blow away the winter cobwebs' had something to do with making people feel better in the winter time, although a smaller number were able to gain the full two marks by explaining that the experience freshened up the mind and body after the gloom of winter. Similarly, although many candidates appreciated that 'grotesque' meant something like 'unusual' or 'weird', only a minority successfully explained 'grotesque-looking little folk' to mean small people who were in some way ugly or scary in their appearance.
- (h) Unfortunately, not all candidates appeared to understand clearly the precise requirements of this task. The question asked for a summary of what 'parents would particularly like about Efteling' and the expectation was that candidates would look at details of the description from the point of view of parents with children and identify those features that would particularly please them *as parents*, rather than simply to identify any features of the park which might appeal to any visitor whether a parent or not. So, mention of the skating rink was, in itself, not sufficient to gain a mark, but mentioning that the skating rink *encouraged children to skate safely* would have shown a secure understanding of a parental concern.
- (i) This question also assessed the candidates' response to the writer's language; most candidates achieved one mark for mentioning that the short sentence emphasised the writer's thoughts or made an effective concluding statement to the article; fewer were successful in making any convincing comment about the writer's tone of voice (ironic/surprised) which was conveyed through the choice of this phrase.

Question 2

For the Writing task, candidates were required to write to an imaginary cousin living in the area around Efteling, asking for information about the park and its suitability as a venue for a visit from the candidates' class. Most responded well to this situation, although a small number misread the question and assumed that *they* were actually informing their cousin as to what could be found in Efteling. Candidates who took this approach were unable to do little more than recount what the original passage said about the attractions to be found in the park and their lack of focus prevented them from being highly rewarded for the Content mark.

Those candidates who interpreted the task correctly, in the majority of cases, produced responses that not only gave accurate details of what could be found in the park but also selected and tailored their responses convincingly to explain why particular features might (or might not) be suitable for a class of school children. Similarly, most candidates made some attempt to explain when, in their opinion, it would be best for the visit to be made – these comments were fairly evenly divided between those who recommended a winter visit and those who felt that summertime would have more to offer; either recommendation was acceptable as long as the response made some reference to and deductions from the information given in the original passage.

A minority of candidates dealt only perfunctorily (if at all) with the second and third bullet points in the question and did little more than copy out details from the original passage as to what could be found in Efteling. It was difficult to reward such responses particularly highly for the Content mark and, if the language was lifted verbatim from the original, it was also difficult to assess accurately the quality of the candidates' independent writing skills. Overall, however, the quality of candidates' written expression was similar to that of previous sessions; most were capable of conveying their thoughts and understanding clearly to their readers; only a small number had such limited linguistic competence that they were unable to make their points understood. Encouragingly, a larger number were able to select vocabulary with some precision as to intended meaning and to punctuate and spell with sufficient accuracy and confidence to achieve marks in the highest band for Written Expression. Examiners were, as has been the case over the last few years, impressed with the way candidates responded to the Writing task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most candidates performed at least satisfactorily on this paper and their answers showed that they had a mainly secure understanding of the reading passage and that they were capable of expressing themselves with some accuracy and competence when producing a piece of written English. However, slightly more candidates than in previous years appeared to have misread the sub-questions in **Question 1**.

The message for those planning to take this examination in the future is to ensure that candidates answer the questions on the paper carefully and fully. They should spend some time reading the questions and gaining a full understanding of what those questions are testing and how they are going to respond, before they commit themselves to writing their answers.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/12

Reading Passage (Core) 12

General comments

Overall, the passage about Bewilderwood, the eco-friendly theme park in the east of England, proved to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. Responses to the sub-questions in **Question 1** revealed that the main points in the article had been clearly understood and many candidates responded well to the more straightforward questions. However, a significant number of candidates were less successful in their responses to **Questions 1(g)** and **1(i)**, which between them were worth nearly half the total marks available for the first section. The possible reasons for this will be considered in more detail later in this report, but the main concern expressed by Examiners was that many candidates simply did not read the questions sufficiently closely to be aware of the specific points that were being tested.

The standard of the responses to **Question 2**, the Writing task, was, in general, consistent with that of previous years and many candidates wrote full and engaging answers which revealed a secure understanding not only of both the passage and task but also of the audience for whom they were writing. Overall, there was very little evidence that candidates were adversely affected by time pressures and most completed all tasks fully and without any apparent need to rush their answers. Indeed, some candidates were able to spend time on writing detailed notes for **Questions 1(i)** and **2** and were still able to write responses of at least adequate length for the Writing task. Handwriting was generally of a good standard and the presentation of the scripts clearly reflected the serious commitment with which most candidates approached the examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

The questions which focused on assessing candidates' ability to select, analyse and evaluate what is relevant to specific purposes, and to demonstrate understanding of how writers achieve effects, caused challenges for many candidates.

- (a) Most candidates successfully identified the creature by the name of 'Mildred'; those who referred to Mildred as 'Lurks Mildred' were given the benefit of the doubt. Only a small number of candidates, however, successfully identified Mildred as being a '(vegetarian) Crocklebog', information which could be found in the third paragraph.
- (b) This question required candidates to identify three facts from the second paragraph which indicated that the designers of the park were concerned with protecting the environment and a large number of candidates succeeded in gaining the full three marks available by referring to three (or in many cases, all four) of the following points: the buildings were made of 'sustainable wood'; no pesticides were used; many trees had been planted; the café served locally-sourced/organic food.
- (c) Most candidates gained one mark for this question by explaining that the four word statement 'So far, so green' emphasised the fact that the park was eco-friendly; fewer candidates achieved the second available mark which could have been gained either by explaining how the phrase effectively summed up what had gone before and prepared the readers for a slight change of direction or by stating that it emphasised that there was more to be gained from a visit to the park than just environmental awareness.
- (d) The majority of candidates successfully stated at least two appropriate details about the boats on the Scary Lake: they were pink/purple in colour; they ran on electricity; they are reclaimed lifeboats ('lifeboats' alone was not adequate as a response); they moved very slowly ('at a snail's pace').

- (e) Again, most candidates responded well to this question with only a small minority failing to gain at least two marks; the two points to make were that the writer was afraid that her older children would consider themselves too mature or sophisticated for the trip on the lake and that, when they took part in it, they were as excited as the younger children.
- (f) This question was less well answered; a significant minority of candidates appeared not to be aware of the specific reference to the surprise that awaited visitors at the Scary Lake and wrote instead in general terms about Boggles and giant spiders. Others clearly understood the terms of the question but produced explanations that failed to give precise details about the nature of the surprise; those who stated clearly that Mildred was 'in hiding' (thus showing an understanding of the word 'lurks') and that she made visitors jump by letting out a sudden noise or a jet of water gained the full two marks available.
- (g) Unfortunately, this question was generally not well answered. The purpose of this question type is to specifically test the Assessment Objective to 'understand how writers achieve effects'. Consequently, the requirement was that candidates should identify words and phrases that, through the associations of the vocabulary and tone of voice used by the writer, suggested to the reader that Bewilderwood provides 'good old-fashioned fun'. It was not enough, therefore, for candidates simply to list details of activities in the park which provided enjoyment for visitors, as providing enjoyment is, after all, the main purpose of any theme park.

Candidates were required to identify words or phrases used by the writer that specifically referred to activities which suggested clearly to the reader a sense of the quaint old-fashioned nature of the park's activities. Thus, stating that the park belonged 'to a pre-computer game, pre-media player, pre-cell-phone era' was a fully appropriate choice worth two marks; however, merely quoting that Bewilderwood was 'partly inspired by the 90's computer game *Myst*' did not make clear that the candidate had fully appreciated the implications of the phrase 'good-old fashioned fun'. Examiners did reward one mark to candidates who convincingly justified quotations that were not included in the mark scheme for this question as long as the explanation showed evidence of an ability to engage with the writer's language.

- (h) This question tested candidates' understanding of vocabulary and idiom; a pleasing number showed a general understanding that 'real driving force' had something to do with the inspiration or motivation behind the setting-up of Bewilderwood, but the full two marks were awarded only to those who not only showed an understanding of 'driving force' but who also explained the intensifying effect of the word 'real'. The second part of this question which required candidates to explain the meaning of 'dappled sunshine' caused greater problems as only a very small number of responses showed a clear understanding that the word 'dappled' meant that the sunlight filtered through the leaves of trees rather than being the direct open sunlight that most candidates imagined.
- (i) Unfortunately, not all candidates appeared to understand clearly the precise requirements of this task. The question asked for a summary of what 'parents would particularly like about Bewilderwood' and the expectation was that candidates would look at details of the description from the point of view of parents with children and identify those features that would particularly please them as parents, rather than simply identify any features of the park which might appeal to any visitor whether a parent or not. So, reference to the snack shack, in itself, was not sufficient to gain a mark, but mentioning that the food that it sold was organic would have shown a secure understanding of a parental concern and would have been rewarded.

Question 2

For the Writing task, candidates were required to write to an imaginary cousin planning to visit Bewilderwood, giving information about the park, including what would and would not appeal to visitors of 8 and 15 years old and some explanation of what makes Bewilderwood different from other theme parks. Most candidates responded well to this situation and wrote using a tone and register fully appropriate to the intended audience. The least successful responses did little more than simply re-tell a day's visit to Bewilderwood, based very closely on the content of the original passage. Such treatment of the task was, however, uncommon and most candidates made pleasing attempts not only to distinguish between those features of the park that would appeal to the two specific age groups mentioned in the question but also to highlight the features of the park and the principles on which it was based that made it unique – the most successful responses were those that used this third bullet point as the basis for their letter and blended the other required details skilfully into it.

Most candidates showed a clear awareness of the audience for whom they were writing and a conscious, and usually successful, attempt to write in a tone which was acceptably informal and without becoming overly colloquial (although some rather undermined this by concluding their letters 'Yours faithfully'). Overall, the quality of candidates' written expression was similar to that of previous sessions; most were capable of conveying their thoughts and understanding clearly to their readers; only a small number had such limited linguistic competence that they were unable to make their points understood and, encouragingly, a larger number were able to select vocabulary with some precision as to intended meaning, and to punctuate and spell with sufficient accuracy and confidence to achieve marks in the highest band for Written Expression. Examiners were, as has been the case over the last few years, impressed with the way candidates responded to the Writing task.

Conclusion

In conclusion, most candidates performed at least satisfactorily on this paper and their answers showed that they had a mainly secure understanding of the reading passage and that they were capable of expressing themselves with some accuracy and competence when producing a piece of written English. However, slightly more candidates than in previous years appeared to have misread the sub-questions in Question 1.

The message for those planning to take this examination in the future is to ensure that candidates answer the questions on the paper carefully and fully. They should spend some time reading the questions and gaining a full understanding of what those questions are testing and how they are going to respond, before they commit themselves to writing their answers.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/21
Reading Passages (Extended) 21

General comments

Most candidates for this component responded to all three questions in sufficient length and had some understanding of how each question has to be answered. **Question 1** was generally answered well, and many candidates adopted an appropriate tone of voice to represent Signor Alessandro as he was depicted in the passage. There was an improvement in answering **Question 2** compared with last year's paper, but too many candidates made general comments about the language instead of focusing on the writer's choice of particular words and their meanings. Some candidates did not understand what was required when writing a summary and there was still confusion between writing informative prose and a commentary.

It was important to understand that each question required a different approach. The first question was largely writing to comment, the second to analyse and the third to inform. Candidates who adapted their writing style accordingly scored consistently high marks.

Although this was a First Language English Examination, many responses did not demonstrate a wide vocabulary or apparent understanding of words such as 'arrogant' and 'aroma'. In order to score high marks candidates needed to have a wide range of language at their disposal.

It is important that candidates follow the instruction about writing about a side in total for the summary, allowing for the size of handwriting. Some candidates with small handwriting wrote a side without any concision and candidates using word processing frequently wrote far too much. The guidelines are as follows: large handwriting is approximately five words per line, average, eight words and small eleven and more. As usual, Examiners were instructed not to be over-strict and only to penalise when the amount written was clearly excessive. Neither candidates nor Examiners are expected to count words.

Candidates should be aware that the length requirements are based on the assumption that answer sheets are of standard A4 size. It would be appreciated if word processed answers could be double spaced to assist markers in identifying content points.

A minority of Centres did not follow procedures when submitting scripts. Some pages were not fixed together at all, and as a result, candidates were in danger of losing some of their work. Other pages were presented in the wrong order which meant that Examiners had to search all the way through the script to finish marking a particular question. Occasionally a page appeared upside down. Candidates should be reminded that it is in their interests to present their scripts carefully and neatly. Examiners were grateful to some candidates whose handwriting was exceptionally clear.

Centres are reminded that although ten marks were available for aspects of writing, no marks were given or taken away for accuracy, including spelling, punctuation and grammar. These aspects of writing were important throughout Paper 31. Proof reading for clarity is always an advantage, however, as is planning for structure.

Question 1: Immediately after the sequences that you have just read about, Signor Alessandro gives a TV interview. The interviewer asks three questions: Some people say that you are an eccentric man whose behaviour is odd at times. Are they right? Can you explain the unexpected happenings that took place at the beginning of your Beethoven concert? Do you think that the time has come for you to retire from conducting? Write the words of the interview. Base your answer on what you have read in Passage A.

[20 marks]

Candidates often spent a good deal of time on this question and tried to write a realistic interview which was grounded in the content of the passage. It is worth reminding candidates that this is a reading task rather

than a creative writing exercise or test of general knowledge, so deviation from the text is 'drifting' and can not be credited.

Good responses to the first question by the interviewer started in general terms, discussing what was meant by 'eccentric', what sort of people made these 'accusations' and why great musicians were different from the norm. They mentioned Alessandro's habit of singing to himself or making sudden gestures. All these points were derived clearly from the text and were good examples of inferential thinking. These answers then went on to mention or develop the matters of the curry, the taking of a taxi and the tying of the tie. They had to invent a reason why Signor Alessandro only tied his tie at the last moment. Really good responses integrated these factual points into the wider discussion about eccentricity.

The second question required a lot of detail. Good candidates mentioned the traffic jam, the arrival onto the stage, the playing of the wrong music and the attitude of the leader. The first two of these items were easy, the third a little more complicated and the fourth the most difficult, although all that was required to answer was in the text.

Good responses nearly always answered the last question with words like 'Absolutely not' and used the rest of their response as an excuse to protest Signor Alessandro's greatness and his many gifts to his public and to his candidates. Throughout these responses there was a strong sense of boastfulness and arrogance as directed in the passage. The character of Signor Alessandro was inferred from the reading of the whole passage, and was a strong feature of a good answer.

Average answers started with a brief comment in response to the interviewer's question and then went on to detail the curry and the adrenaline, the taxi and the olive groves, and the tying of the tie. Less good answers did little to show their understanding of the wording of this section, repeating some of the language of the original. Slightly better candidates provided brief explanatory comments as they went along and sometimes added references to Signor Alessandro's superstitious mind.

In answer to the second question, average responses referred to the traffic jam and the arrival on stage. They often made a brief reference to the playing of the wrong symphony, but did not provide a good explanation. There was no reference to the leader, or there was evidence of misreading. The answer to the third question often agreed, rather out of character, that it was time to retire, and the explanation was not always clear. Although Signor Alessandro had some voice, it was not always strong.

Weak answers were those that missed detail and sometimes misread the text. There was a straightforward repetition of the wording of the curry, the taxi and the tie, without any development. This section missed out any justification of whatever character Signor Alessandro might have. Answers were very literal and there was little or no sign of any inferential reading. The account of the disastrous concert was also literal and had no linking material or explanation, just a series of facts. Most responses missed any reference to the wrong symphony and the leader. A plain and undeveloped answer was given to the interviewer's third question.

It was important that candidates used supporting detail (explicit) from the text but that their answers should be inferential. The most obvious example of inference was the revelation of Signor Alessandro's character in the interview. Strong responses included more hidden detail. For example, it could be assumed that Signor Alessandro went to sleep in the taxi and that the confusion over the symphonies occurred in the restaurant and not at the last minute. His obsession with being on time was important, as was his age and failing memory. There was also the matter of humility and arrogance, which was only evident in the responses that scored high marks.

Finally, candidates should remember that it was not sufficient to identify appropriate material in the text and either to copy it out (for which they received under half marks) or simply to paraphrase it. They were expected to adapt the content of the passage to their specific answers.

The mark out of five for writing was awarded predominantly for the ability to write clearly in the style of the character of Signor Alessandro, and to sequence and order the work. Many candidates did well and scored four or five marks.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) Signor Alessandro's enjoyment of the curry in paragraph 1 and (b) the traffic jam in paragraph 3. Select words and phrases from these descriptions and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Most candidates made sensible choices of words and brief phrases to form the basis of their answers. However, some candidates wrote long quotations that proved far too difficult for any focused comments. The choice should be mostly of single words or phrases of two to three words. Some candidates also tried grouping three or four choices and making a very generalised comment about them but responses of this type were not focused sufficiently to attract marks. It was good to establish links between different words, but each had to be treated separately.

As far as explaining effects was concerned, it was important that candidates started from an understanding of exactly what the word meant. In the first section having said that the curry was 'cooked to perfection', too often 'succulent' became another example of perfection and 'heavenly' yet another.

What the candidate should have done is to ask the question 'Why did the writer use this word rather than an ordinary one?' An example of this would be 'aroma' from part (a). The writer uses 'aroma' rather than 'smell' because 'aroma' makes you think of a gentle, pleasant, pervasive sort of smell, and it cancels out any sort of smell that might be unpleasant.

Where the word creates an image, candidates should go through a further stage. For example, many candidates produced ideas such as, 'The writer describes the view of the traffic as a sea of metal roofs, but there is no sea here. He says it is like a sea because it stretches as far as the eye can see, as it were to the horizon. But why metal roofs? Perhaps he wants you to think of the roofs as waves, each one at a slightly different level, and perhaps they are shining in the sun in the same way as waves do. But metal suggests they are cold and hard, not like real waves.'

The best answers consistently focused on the exact meaning of the word or image and then explained what the use of that word suggested to the reader. In part (a) candidates understood that the writer was referring to different senses and then to all the senses. They also suggested that Signor Alessandro saw himself as someone worthy of being invited to the banquet of the gods. In part (b) they understood that the symphony of horns was an idea that would appeal to Signor Alessandro as a musician and commented on the speed at which he changed the idea of a pleasant sounding symphony to a 'ghastly discord'.

Responses in the middle of the range either included effective explanation of one or two of the words, or consistently made a general comment of some worth about each word, or gave the meanings of the words and not the effects. Candidates were able to make a valid comment about 'tickle' and 'tempt' but were weaker in justifying the references to the gods and heaven. They made a simple but effective comment about the sea image and were often able to comment on the drivers 'staring vacantly'.

Weak answers gave general comments about the words that showed the classification to which they belonged, but never made any precise definition. They did not demonstrate understanding of 'succulent', 'aroma' or 'tickle' in relation to the taste buds. They referred to the quality of the curry in reference to all the words that had been chosen and gave simple comments such as 'aroma' means a strong smell' or 'ghastly discord' means a nasty noise'.

In order to answer this question effectively candidates needed to understand a wide range of words, most of which had precise meanings, and to show what the use of these words suggested to the reader. There were a number of candidates who did not have sufficient vocabulary to do this.

As usual, the following answer is above the standard of the top mark, but gives Centres and candidates some idea of what sort of response they could be making.

(a) *Signor Alessandro's enjoyment of the curry in paragraph 1*

Throughout the passage the curry is described in exaggerated terms. The vocabulary that is used presents it as something out of this world, cooked 'to perfection'. The writer could have described it as 'juicy' but prefers 'succulent' where the onomatopoeia recreates the moment when the teeth press against the tender flesh. The writer uses 'aroma' which is a delicate, exotic type of smell with no unpleasant connotations. There is a play of senses – that the aroma 'tickles' and the taste buds are 'tempted' suggest not just smell and taste but a gentle effect, perhaps almost wicked, like someone at work with a feather. When the 'chillies excite all the senses' it is like an explosion of sound from Signor Alessandro's orchestra. The rest of the

description is centred on 'heaven' and 'the gods'. Like his music these are very classical. ... become a 'banquet fit for the gods' and Signor Alessandro, expressing his utmost pleasure (ah... invited to this heavenly encounter. As he eats we feel he has entered heaven – which probably high opinion of himself.

(b) The traffic jam in paragraph 3

There are two important images. Of course there is no real sea, but looking at the never-ending traffic jam reminds one of a sea stretching to the horizon, but the water (waves) have become hard and cold 'metal roofs' and maybe too the light shines on them as it would on the waves. Because Signor Alessandro is a musician it is natural that the continuous sound of the horns reminds him of a 'symphony'. But he cannot sustain the comparison because symphonies sound beautiful, so he corrects his impression to a 'ghastly discord' and in comparing it to the 'most experimental of contemporary music' he gives away his perhaps limited musical taste. A final image is of the 'drivers staring vacantly into the motionless...'. This gives an hypnotic impression of gazing at nothing, and the ellipsis slow everything down until the atmosphere becomes 'soporific' and the great conductor, we suppose, nods off in his taxi.

Question 3: Summarise the evidence that the orchestra described in Passage B is 'really terrible' and (b) what Signor Allessandro thinks are the qualities of a great conductor as described in Passage A. You should write about 1 side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting.

[20 marks]

Passage B may have proved a challenge for candidates who had already worked through two questions based on Passage A. The question was not difficult, although candidates had to use some judgement in answering. There were fourteen possible points available and many responses only scored about a third of the points which suggested that the new passage had not been read with enough care. Candidates had no difficulty in identifying the points that came early in the passage, but did not always write down the points that came later. This suggested that the passage itself was not difficult but that reading was incomplete and summary skills were lacking.

For the second part of the summary, candidates had to select the sections of the passage that were relevant to the question. The content of this part of the summary was literal enough. There were nine points available and a number of candidates found it reasonably easy to identify all of them.

In the best summaries, the points were re-ordered to make a coherent sequence rather than a disconnected list, which required planning.

There were however, a number of frequent weaknesses in responses as follows:

- Explaining points at great length (often as they appeared in the passage). Candidates needed to use as few words as possible to clarify a point.
- Copying whole phrases out of the original. It was not necessary to explain every single word in one's own vocabulary, however.
- Writing more than one side allowing for the size of handwriting. (The example given below would fit in less than a side if handwritten.)
- Writing in a descriptive or commentary style rather than an informative style.
- Giving information that was not focused on the question.
- Repeating the same point.
- Not making the point sufficiently clearly.

These weaknesses affected the mark given for aspects of writing. Responses which contained over long answers of two to three sides lost all their marks for writing. Many responses were concise for part **(b)** but answers to part **(a)** were not focused and lacked concision. It is important that candidates consider what the points are and do not write merely to fill the space.

A lack of careful selection, restructuring or simple planning of the answer was evident in the case of weaker responses. This also affected the writing mark, since fluency and clarity are expected for Band 1. Lack of relevance or precision was usually resulted in a writing mark of 2 or 3.

When reading the following answer, candidates should note that the points are made simply and as clearly as possible, and linked together.

Passage B

There is plenty of evidence that the orchestra or the 'players' as referred to by the writer are really such as 'hopeless', 'musical illiterates' and 'squawkers'. Some of them can neither read nor play high notes and they have often not played their instruments for many years. One has thirty instruments but hardly play any of them. You do not have to audition to get into this orchestra and the sound it makes is unbalanced and in no way beautiful. Once they start playing they act strangely, playing the music at the wrong speed and swapping tricky bits with other players. Some members play the wrong piece. The orchestra never rehearses anything twice because the music gets worse, and if it is too hard, they sulk.

Passage A

Signor Alessandro thinks that great conductors, knowing their music by heart, can control their players with their eyes and with carefully chosen gestures. They avoid annoying habits such as moving their feet about, talking at too great a length and (because it is bad manners) tapping their batons for silence. They are never late and demonstrate self-control. It is important that they respect the leaders of their orchestras.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/22

Reading Passages (Extended) 22

General comments

Generally, candidates found this paper interesting and accessible and were able to respond to the subject matter. Examiners reported that most candidates seemed prepared and confident about this paper, and no problems were reported about time allotment. Most candidates responded to all three questions in sufficient length and had some understanding of how each question had to be answered. **Question 1** was generally answered well, and most candidates adopted an appropriate tone of voice in which to address a member of their family on a subject both light-hearted and serious. In answering **Question 2**, too many candidates still made general comments about the language instead of focusing on the writer's choice of particular words and their meanings. Some candidates did not understand what was required when writing a summary and there was still confusion between writing informative prose and a commentary.

It was important to understand that each question required a different approach. The first question was largely writing to comment, the second to analyse and the third to inform. Candidates who adapted their writing style accordingly scored consistently high marks.

Although this was a First Language English Examination, many responses did not demonstrate a wide vocabulary or apparent understanding of words such as 'parasites', 'scooting', 'surge', 'grinders', 'aggrieved' and 'maniacally', all in Passage A. In order to score high marks candidates needed to have a wide range of language at their disposal.

It is important that candidates follow the instruction about writing about a side in total for the summary, allowing for the size of handwriting. Some candidates with small handwriting wrote a side without any concision, and candidates using word processing frequently wrote far too much. The guidelines are as follows: large handwriting is approximately five words per line, average, eight words and small eleven and more. As usual, Examiners were instructed not to be over-strict and only to penalise when the amount written was clearly excessive. Neither candidates nor Examiners are expected to count words.

Candidates should be aware that the length requirements are based on the assumption that answer sheets are of standard A4 size. It would be appreciated if word processed answers could be double spaced to assist markers in identifying content points.

A minority of Centres did not follow procedures when submitting scripts. Some pages were not fixed together at all, and as a result, candidates were in danger of losing some of their work. Other pages were presented in the wrong order which meant that Examiners had to search all the way through the script to finish marking a particular question. Occasionally a page appeared upside down. Candidates should be reminded that it is in their interests to present their scripts carefully and neatly. Examiners were grateful to some candidates whose handwriting was exceptionally clear.

Centres are reminded that although ten marks were available for aspects of writing, no marks were given or taken away for accuracy, including spelling, punctuation and grammar. These aspects of writing were important throughout Paper 32. Proof reading for clarity is always an advantage, however, as is planning for structure.

Examiners commented that it was easy to see which candidates had been prepared well. It was also noted by several Examiners that those candidates who decided to do **Question 3** first tended to disadvantage themselves by being less able to find relevant points because of insufficient familiarity with Passage A.

Question 1: Imagine you are the writer's friend, Lary. Write a letter to a member of your family about your visit to the gorilla sanctuary. In your letter you should: make the chimps and gorillas interesting and lovable; give your impressions of Mark and of Madame Yvette; persuade your family to support the work of the sanctuary. Base your answer on what you have read in Passage A.

[20 marks]

Candidates often spent a good deal of time on this question and tried to write a realistic letter which was grounded in the content of the passage. It is worth reminding candidates that this is a reading task rather than a creative writing exercise or test of general knowledge, so deviation from the text is regarded as 'drifting' and can not be credited.

Good responses sustained a convincing voice throughout, integrated detail carefully, began with a short introduction before moving on to the main purpose of the letter, incorporated personal reactions to what they saw on their visit and avoided re-telling. They observed the differences in character between Mark and Yvette and supported these with detail; they were persuasive in making the work of the sanctuary sound worthwhile and providing specific and practical suggestions for supporting it.

Weak responses used the facts in the passage mechanically or in a narrative retelling of the visit as a whole, with or without lifting from the passage; did not distinguish between pygmy chimps (rare and only one of them present) and gorillas (it is a gorilla sanctuary) or omitted any reference to Magne; concentrated on 'lovable' and were unable to produce reasons for 'interesting'; confused the present sanctuary with plans to build an orphanage somewhere else in the future; were too vague about Mark and Yvette, describing them simply as 'nice people'. Furthermore, these responses used the material which would have been suitable for persuading the family to support the work of the sanctuary (third prompt) where it had no place as an answer to what made the chimps and gorillas 'lovable' or 'interesting'; said nothing or little in response to the third prompt other than a vague exhortation such as 'we must help them'. There was plenty of scope here to prove inferential understanding by suggesting that more medically trained personnel would be beneficial to the recovery of the diseased animals, or more toys would keep them amused and take their minds off their sufferings, or more staff would allow greater one-to-one care and supervision so that gorillas could be let out of cages more often than once a week.

It was a strong feature of a good answer that the addressee of the letter was someone interested in animal welfare, as this lent the task an extra degree of credibility. Short, contextualising introductions were beneficial to setting the tone and the relationship between the letter's writer and recipient; these were particularly effective where mention was made of the recipient's interest in wild animals. Good candidates then went on to start their answer to the first question by explaining about their visit and why it had made such an impression on them, leading into their response to the lovable nature of the pygmy chimp, and then contrasting this with the interesting features of gorillas.

Weak responses made no mention of Magne, as if candidates did not consider him and his behaviour 'interesting'. Repeating the prompts in the question is not creditworthy. To repeat on a number of occasions that the chimps were interesting and lovable, or even cute, was insufficient to show understanding of implicit meaning in the passage.

The information about the suffering of gorilla babies in the wild did not belong to the prompt about 'interesting and lovable' and good responses integrated these factual details into the wider discussion that was their answer to the third prompt. Weaker answers did not re-structure the material and did not use the animals' trauma at the hands of poachers as a persuasive device to elicit support for the sanctuary. Often they did not distinguish between pygmy chimps and gorillas when giving factual information.

The second prompt about Mark and Madame Yvette required candidates to infer characteristics from their words and actions, rather than just to describe or retell them. Average responses referred to the fact that Mark was knowledgeable and dedicated and that Yvette was brave, but did not give supporting evidence. Most average responses missed any reference to Yvette's dynamic quality or assertiveness. A few responses demonstrated misunderstanding about Mark being 'sprawled' and thought that this showed that he was lazy or 'laid back'. They often made a brief reference to his wanting to be a zoologist but did not develop this. Weaker responses were not able to infer the characteristics of Yvette and Mark, only describe what they did, and without differentiating between them.

Plain and undeveloped answers were often given to the third prompt, or it was completely missing. These answers sometimes mentioned the general need to support the sanctuary but it was not always clear why, and in what ways. Often there was no more than a single sentence vaguely exhorting the reader to give

support to the sanctuary. Good answers were able to specify what exactly could be done, and how money from donations could be spent to further the work of the sanctuary. Weak answers switched to an impersonal appeal at the end, which did not follow naturally and was not appropriate for the recipient of the letter.

Weak answers were also those that missed detail and sometimes misread the text, for instance by believing that Max and Magne were the same species. It was not always understood what the difference was between chimps and gorillas, or between Mark and Yvette, or between Mark and Max. Some candidates did not distinguish between the actual sanctuary and the orphanage and breeding colony planned for the future. Weaker scripts tended to make no reference to Magne, or showed evidence of misreading, e.g. that Magne was the father of the two baby gorillas being carried by Yvette. These answers also fell into narrative mode, and were not always clear about who received Magne's attentions. There was a straightforward repetition of the wording of the role of Albertine, without any development. Answers were very literal and there was little or no sign of any inferential reading, just a series of facts.

Thoughtful responses used hidden detail. For example, it could be assumed that the sanctuary was short of money from their not having sufficient staff to let Magne out of his cage more than once a week. There was also the matter of him needing to be kept behind very strong bars, and the implications of this was only evident in the responses that scored high marks.

Finally, candidates should remember that it was not sufficient to identify appropriate material in the text and either to copy it out (for which they received under half marks) or simply to paraphrase it. There needed to be evidence of a transformation of genre from an article to a letter in the modification of the tone and language. The bullet point prompts are not optional and provide candidates with a structure to their answer.

The mark out of five for writing was mainly for the ability to write a clearly expressed, sequenced and linked response in an appropriate and consistent style. Many candidates did well and scored four or five marks. However, Examiners commented on the lack of paragraphing in some scripts. Paragraphing is not required in **Question 2** and **Question 3**, but is expected in **Question 1**.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the sounds as Magne approaches the room and his behaviour when he enters, in lines 39 to 43 and (b) the writer's impressions of Magne in lines 48 to 54. Select words and phrases from these descriptions and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Part **(a)** was generally answered more effectively than **(b)**, as most candidates were able to comment on the anticipatory threat of 'clang' and 'rumbling', whereas they struggled to make much of 'marlin spikes' or 'sweet as cow's breath'. The latter could be interpreted as either ironic or contrastive, depending on the candidate's perception of which was the more likely in the context. Most candidates attempted at least a small number of effects. Some candidates did not provide the minimum requirement of three appropriate choices, especially for part **(b)**. This was disappointing, given how many were available for selection. Candidates who grouped choices together or gave them as one long sentence reduced their ability to make meaningful specific comments about individual words and phrases.

For part **(a)**, 'bolt' was widely misunderstood to refer to lightning, even though this did not make sense in the context. The subtlety of 'detached' and 'roughed up' within the context of the passage, which are not seriously aggressive actions, was not commented on in many responses, but good candidates could see the contrasts and contradictions in Magne's behaviour. In part **(b)**, there was occasional misunderstanding or confusion about the actions and the gender of Magne, and between the writer and his friend. Weaker responses avoided mention of the imagery in part **(b)**, or mentioned it but did not attempt to explain. Few explained 'pink cavern' convincingly; 'maniacally' was not generally well dealt with, and was ignored by most candidates. Candidates did not always select appropriately; the ordinary language of 'big and grey' or 'shiny black face' does not lend itself to explanation or an analysis of the effect of the choice by the writer.

Better responses were able both to formulate an overview whilst also giving the precise meanings and effects of individual choices, particularly in part **(a)**. They mentioned the tension building up by hearing but not seeing the release of Magne, and his speed and power as he approached. In part **(b)** they appreciated that the description was predicated upon the closeness of the gorilla's face to that of the writer, and how frightening that must have been.

Some responses to this question were over long. One to one and a half sides of writing is sufficient for this question, which carries 10 marks and therefore should be given a proportionate amount of time in comparison to the other two questions.

Most candidates gave sensible choices of words and brief phrases to form the basis of their answers. However, some candidates wrote long quotations that proved far too difficult for any focused comments. As in previous sessions, there was too much usage of lists of choices or extended, lifted language, or the peppering of answers with literary terms which did not take candidates any further in the exploration of effects. The choices should be mostly of single words or phrases of two to three words. Some candidates also tried grouping three or four choices and making a generalised comment about them but responses of this type were not focused sufficiently to attract marks. It was good to establish links between different words, but each had to be treated separately. General interpretations, such as Magne was strong or aggressive, applied to all choices, were not rewarded above Band 2, especially if specific meanings were not given. Dominance was a more subtle idea, and better candidates realised that there were contrasts in his behaviour, and even some humour evident.

As far as explaining effects was concerned, it was important that candidates started from an understanding of exactly what the word meant. For example, having selected the word 'clang' in part (a), they should have gone further in defining it than just making a vague reference to its being a type of sound. What the candidate should then have done is to ask the question 'Why did the writer use this word rather than an ordinary one?' An example of this would be from part (b) where the writer uses 'grinders' rather than 'teeth'. This is because 'grinders' makes you think of reducing something or someone to tiny pieces, and the pain involved in that process, and therefore has a stronger effect than the neutral and purely factual word 'teeth'.

Where the word creates an image, candidates should go through a further stage. For example, many candidates produced ideas such as, 'The writer describes the muscle metaphorically as a 'surge'', but they did not explain that this is a word used in the context of powerful currents such as electricity or tides, and that therefore it is creating the effect that the gorilla is unstoppable powerful, a force of nature, and potentially fatally dangerous.

The best responses consistently thought of the exact meaning of the word or image and then explained what the use of that word suggested to the reader. They were also able to relate each choice to an overview. In part (a) they understood that the gorilla was anxious to make use of his rare freedom to assert himself over the other gorillas and humans present. In part (b) they realised that the writer's encounter with the gorilla was much too close for comfort and that he was terrified.

Answers in the middle of the range either explained one or two of the words well, or consistently made a general comment of some worth about each word, or gave the meanings of the words and not the effects. They were able to make a valid comment in part (a) about 'barking' and 'rumbling' but were weaker in justifying the references to 'banged his chest' and 'tore at the grass'. They made a simple comment about these images showing aggression, but did not pursue this further to suggest that these actions were not intended to hurt anyone, only to send a message that he was the 'boss'.

Weak responses gave general comments about the words that showed the classification to which they belonged, but never made any precise definition. They did not understand 'bolt' or 'detached'. They referred to Magne's violence in reference to all the words they chose and gave simple comments such as 'a scream is a loud noise' or 'slapped means that he hit her'.

In order to answer this question effectively candidates needed to understand a wide range of words, most of which had precise meanings, and to show what the use of these words suggested to the reader. There were a number of candidates who did not have sufficient vocabulary to do this.

As usual, the following answer is above the standard of the top mark, but gives Centres and candidates some idea of what sort of response they could be making.

(a) *the sounds as Magne approaches the room and his behaviour when he enters, in lines 39 to 43*

Magne has been cooped up for a week, and therefore he is very lively, and needs to remind everyone of his existence and dominance through noise and assertive actions. The fact that the writer cannot see him to begin with, only hear him, adds tension and suspense. We know that he is kept in a very strong cage because of the words 'bolt' and 'clang', which refer to metal and the noise it makes, reminding us of the release of a prisoner. His 'sharp scream' suggests that he is frustrated and that the humans might be in for trouble, and 'barking' reminds us of dogs, another aggressive animal when threatened or when its territory is

invaded. His approach is 'rumbling', which is a word often used about thunder and again an impression of weight. His 'scooting gallop' relates him to yet another animal, and emphasises his speed and sense of urgency. The writer gets the impression that he would knock over anything in his way. The word 'detached' is a comical, somewhat gentle word, and 'roughed them up a bit' implies that although he wishes to make clear to the baby gorillas that he is the alpha male and entitled to respect, he has no intention of hurting them, and the same is true of his having 'slapped' Yvette, which is a relatively mild word. When he 'banged his chest' and 'tore at the grass' he is performing stereotypical actions to convey strength and authority. There is a comical aspect to this description, as well as an underlying sense of potential danger.

(b) the writer's impressions of Magne in lines 48 to 54

The description stresses the great weight and strength of the adult male gorilla and how close he came to the writer, who became 'stupid', that is completely stunned, by his 'solidity', meaning the density of his body. The 'surge of his muscle' conveys the unstoppable force he could exert, like a wave of electrical current. His chest-hair being 'bristly' is an image based on the sense of touch which shows how close he was to the writer; it smelt of 'rank musk', a smell image, equally unpleasant and associated with large animals. There are three images to create fear and show how close the gorilla's face was to the writer's: 'marlin spikes' is a comparison of the spike of the huge fish to the canine teeth of Magne, suggesting he could tear flesh apart very easily; 'grinders' are another way of referring to his teeth, this time stressing the damage they could do, like reducing corn to flour; the 'pink cavern' makes his mouth seem wide open and deep, as if he is threatening to eat the writer. The smell of his breath being 'as sweet as cow's' reinforces the proximity of the man and the animal; it is presumably a true if unexpected description, as gorillas, like cows, are herbivores. To make him seem even more threatening, Magne is said to be 'growling maniacally', comparing him to a mad person capable of anything, and because he is 'aggrieved', meaning he was annoyed at being locked up all week and feeling jealous of the baby gorillas, he might want revenge.

Question 3: Summarise (a) the dangers that exist for orang-utans, according to Passage B, and (b) the care and understanding demonstrated by Yvette Leroy and her staff for the pygmy chimp and the gorillas in Passage A. You should write about 1 side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting.

[20 marks]

Good answers were concise, focused, and used own words assiduously; made points clearly, succinctly and fluently; included a full range of points and not only the obvious ones.

Weaker answers lifted or copied large parts of the passage; repeated points (particularly 1 and 7 in part (a)); gave long explanations which diluted the focus; were not specific enough about all the different ways in which 'care and understanding' were shown in part (b); or drifted into the problems faced by the animals in the wild. There was a risk of overlap between points unless they were carefully worded.

Candidates achieved more marks for part (a) on the whole. The content of this part of the summary was literal enough, although there were some unnecessary long introductions, and too much lifting. It was acceptable for 'deforestation' to be used without alteration, as a technical term which would take too many words to paraphrase, but not to copy whole phrases or sentences. The point about extinction was too often repeated without the necessary change of focus to pick up the marks for the three separate points: declining population, possible future extinction and slow reproductive cycle.

There were eleven possible points available for part (a). Answers sometimes gave too much irrelevant information about palm-oil production or the forests of Borneo. Point 2 about the fires was often missed, as was point 6 about the declining population. Consequently, writing marks were lost because of lack of focus and concision, since answers did not include only those sections of the passage that were relevant to the question. This exercise is a selective summary and candidates needed to ignore anything not strictly relevant to the question as set for each half of the summary.

The second part of the summary was more challenging, since candidates had to be specific about the manifestations of 'care and understanding'. Responses which scored no more than half the available content marks were vague and had a tendency to digress into a description of the plight of the animals or why the sanctuary was important. The more inferential points were often missed: 17 (allowing Magne out of his cage) and 24 (Yvette's tolerance of Magne hitting her.) Sometimes the use of a preposition showed misunderstanding, as in the claim that the chimps were treated with parasites. Whenever precise reading and slight interpretation was required, weaker responses tended to use vague language and generalisations.

In the best summaries, the points were re-ordered to make a coherent sequence rather than a list which requires planning.

There were however, a number of frequent weaknesses in responses as follows:

- Explaining points at great length (often as they appeared in the passage). Candidates needed to use as few words as possible to clarify a point.
- Copying whole phrases out of the original. It was not necessary to explain every single word in one's own vocabulary, however.
- Writing more than one side allowing for the size of handwriting. (The example given below would fit in less than a side if handwritten.)
- Writing in a descriptive or commentary style rather than an informative style.
- Giving information that was not focused on the question.
- Repeating the same point.
- Not making the point sufficiently clearly.

These weaknesses affected the mark given for aspects of writing. Responses which contained over long answers of two to three sides lost all their marks for writing. Many responses were concise for part **(a)** but answers to part **(b)** were not focused and lacked concision. It is important that candidates consider what the points are and do not write merely to fill the space.

A lack of careful selection, restructuring or simple planning of the answer was evident in the case of weaker responses. This also affected the writing mark, since fluency and clarity are expected for Band 1. Lack of relevance or precision was usually resulted in a writing mark of 2 or 3. Some summaries included commentary, were overlong, or fell into the wrong genre and became persuasive speeches appealing for help for gorillas and chimps.

When reading the following answer, candidates should note that the points are made simply and as clearly as possible, and linked together.

Passage B

Orang-utans in Borneo are in danger of losing their habitat and food source because of deforestation and the deliberate forest fires set to clear land. Because of their slow reproductive cycle they cannot keep pace with their death rate, and their declining population over the last ten years may lead to total extinction in thirty years if the rate increases by only two percent. The deaths are caused by the babies being captured for meat or as pets, and the fact that a mother is killed for every baby. Poachers have easy access to the orang-utans now that illegal loggers have built roads into the rainforest.

Passage A

The baby chimps are dressed in a nappy and treated as a mother treats a human baby, very gently and with hugging and stroking. Yvette carries baby gorillas around with her and refers to them as her babies. They are also given medical treatment for their parasites, and individual attention by the staff if traumatised. The larger gorillas are allowed out of their cage to run around when possible, and the plan is to release them somewhere safe at a later stage, after an orphanage and breeding colony have been set up. Mark is very knowledgeable about the animals, and Yvette understands their feelings and behaviour so that she knows what makes them feel threatened and tolerates their apparently aggressive actions.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/23

Reading Passages (Extended) 23

General comments

Most candidates for this component responded to all three questions at sufficient length and had some understanding of how each question had to be answered. **Question 1** was generally answered well, particularly for the first section which focused on the mother's viewpoint and where many candidates adopted an appropriate tone of voice. In **Question 2**, answers were usually of an appropriate length and contained a range of selections of language, but some candidates made general comments about their choices instead of focusing on why the writer chose those particular words, to be inferred from their effect on the reader. Some candidates still did not understand what was required when writing a summary for **Question 3**, and as in previous sessions, there was confusion between writing informative prose and a commentary.

It was important to understand that each question required a different approach. The first question was largely writing to comment, the second to analyse and the third to inform. Candidates who adapted their writing style accordingly scored consistently high marks.

Although this was a First Language English Examination, many responses did not demonstrate a wide vocabulary or apparent understanding of the subtle nuances of words and expressions such as the fact that 'a grocery store to be open on Thursdays' is not yet operational. In order to score high marks candidates needed to have a wide range of language at their disposal.

It is important that candidates follow the instruction about writing about a side in total for the summary, allowing for the size of handwriting. Some candidates with small handwriting wrote a side without any concision and candidates using word processing frequently wrote far too much. The guidelines are as follows: large handwriting is approximately five words per line, average, eight words and small eleven and more. As usual, Examiners were instructed not to be over-strict and only to penalise when the amount written was clearly excessive. Neither candidates nor Examiners are expected to count words.

Centres are reminded that although ten marks were available for aspects of writing, no marks were given or taken away for accuracy, including spelling, punctuation and grammar. These aspects of writing were important throughout Paper 33.

Question 1: As a result of the dispute between neighbours, a public meeting has been called. At this meeting, in turn, the writer's mother and the father next door are given the chance to present their views. The chairperson of the meeting asks the mother the following question: "Can you explain why you and the other people in the neighbourhood believe that things have 'gone too far'?" The chairperson of the meeting asks the father next door the following question: "Can you explain your position and views on this matter?" Write the words of the public meeting. Base your answer on what you have read in Passage A.

[20 marks]

This Question proved challenging for some candidates, especially in responding from the viewpoint of the father next door. Formulating logical arguments and adopting an appropriate register for a public meeting proved difficult for some candidates, although a formal speech is one of the genres regularly required for the response to **Question 1** of the Reading passages paper, and of **Question 1** of the Directed Writing and Composition paper. The two speeches needed to sound convincingly representative of the characters as presented in passage A, and the ability to contrast their speech modes was a discriminator. Aggressive answers were not appropriate for such a context, but nor were apologetic ones, given the nature of the participants and the dispute. A register for the father which was flippant, full of slang or insult was inappropriate for a formal public meeting. A chairperson who interrupted the two speeches often caused the dialogue to become fragmented. It was not appropriate to give a significant part of the dialogue to a chairperson or interviewer. These approaches made it difficult to give evidence of understanding of the characters unlike sustained speeches in which the characters expressed and developed their viewpoints.

Weaker responses sometimes allowed the speeches to become a personal attack or argument, and candidates exchanged insults as well as complaints. It was also a feature of weaker responses that they were predominantly no more than an overview, or conversely to be just a sequence of unlinked details (often lifted from the passage without modification), when the requirement was for a well integrated and well sequenced mixture of both general inference and supporting evidence. Good responses integrated detail, such as that the mother had baked a cake to welcome the newcomers, into the characters' responses. Weak answers were those that missed detail, were very literal, and gave no sign of any inferential reading or ability to sequence ideas.

There were a significant number of one-sided responses, with the mother having by far the greater weight of argument. Sometimes the character of the father next door had been misunderstood, so that it was the father of the writer or the husband of the mother who spoke. Their viewpoint was usually the same so this character had little to add, and consequently the alternative viewpoint was then missing. Some candidates did not address the actual complaints made by the mother on behalf of herself and of the neighbourhood generally. The health and school issues which caused concern to the mother and to her children were not always referred to, although they were a necessary dimension of her character and of the problematic relationship with the next-door neighbours, and had caused her to try to 'have a word' with the father. It could be inferred, however, that she herself was not the easiest person to get on with, especially since she would have been prejudiced against whoever took over the house of her former great friends, the Rivas, or because the expectations of the 'new friends' were too high.

Conciliatory and weak apologies without defence were not in the character of the father as presented, nor was it enough for him to simply state that 'It's my property and I can do what I like with it.' The best responses inferred a reason for the need to build the pond, e.g. the boys are creative (as shown by their interest in music) and needed an artistic project; the boys have recently lost their mother and needed a distraction; the father is a fun fair designer by trade. Some candidates did at least have him say that the neighbourhood seemed dull and conservative and needed some fun and colour to brighten it up. Those candidates who interpreted the alligators as being real, and focused on the danger of keeping wild animals in the garden, had misread the passage, which clearly described them as 'plastic', and their responses lacked relevant focus.

Finally, candidates should remember that it was not sufficient to identify appropriate material in the text and either to copy it out (for which they received under half marks) or simply to paraphrase it. They were expected to adapt the content of the passage to their specific answers. The mark out of five for writing was mainly for the ability to write convincingly in the style of the characters, and to sequence and order their response.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the arrival of the new family in paragraph 3 and (b) the new 'garden' in paragraph 8. Select words and phrases from these descriptions and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Most candidates made sensible choices of words and brief phrases to form the basis of their answer. However, some candidates wrote long quotations that proved far too difficult for any focused comments. The choice should be mostly of single words or phrases of two to three words. Some candidates also tried grouping three or four choices and making a generalised comment about them that was not specific enough to attract marks. It was good to establish links between different words, but each had to be treated separately.

Good responses mentioned in part (a) the van, the behaviour of the father, and the appearance of the boys, and in part (b) the different elements of the pond. There were plenty of possible choices to illustrate these aspects of the passage. Average and weaker responses referred only to some of these, or did not provide a high standard of explanation.

As far as explaining effects was concerned, it was important that candidates started from an understanding of exactly what the word meant. In part (a), having said that the father was 'irate', for instance, it was necessary to show that the meaning of this word was known before going on to discuss its implications and connections to other aspects of behaviour. This understanding of meaning must be at least implicit in the response. What the candidate should have done is to ask the question 'Why did the writer use this word rather than an ordinary one?' An example of this would be the use of 'murky' and 'gaudy' in part (b). The writer uses this word rather than 'dirty' because 'murky' suggests hidden depths in which something

unpleasant may be lurking, and thus goes much further than just referring to the clarity of the light. 'Dark' is stronger than 'bright' as a colour description, and much more critical as being suggestive of bad things.

Where the word creates an image, candidates should go through a further stage. For example, candidates produced ideas such as, 'The writer describes the garden as singing, which is a metaphor because gardens do not sing' but did not then explore the reasons why this image is used and what the effect might be on those who had to listen to the 'cacophony', day and night, and how this related to the musical instruments brought into the house. There was a high frequency of candidates simply identifying literary terms, without focusing on actual word choices and their effects in the context which does not earn the higher band marks. Several mentioned 'foreshadowing' but did not explain or develop this idea.

Responses in the middle of the range were either able to explain several of the words well, or consistently made a general comment of some worth about each word, or gave the meanings of a range of words but not the effects. They were, for instance, able to make a valid comment about 'squeal' and 'bang' in part (a) but there was little evidence of understanding of the references to 'dark plumes' and 'cartoon style'.

In order to answer this question effectively candidates needed to understand a wide range of words, most of which had precise meanings, and to show what the use of these words suggested to the reader. There were a number of candidates who did not demonstrate sufficient vocabulary to do this.

As usual, the following answer is above the standard of the top mark, but gives Centres and candidates some idea of what sort of response they could be making.

(a) *The arrival of the new family in paragraph 3*

Throughout the passage the new neighbours are described as annoying to the other residents in the area, mainly because of the noise they produce by various methods, and the dirt they generate. The 'squeal of brakes' and the 'wreck of a van' convey the idea that their possessions are not well maintained, and this negligence, reinforced by the 'grey pallor of neglect' of their appearance, will spread to their new property. This is in contrast to the purr of the engine of the Riviera's vehicle, so we can expect them to be a very different type of neighbour. The 'dark plumes of exhaust clouds' associates the family with dirt and pollution, which is also reflected in the 'dirty torn jeans'. The malnourishment of the boys, a further indication of the father's carelessness, is indicated by their being 'strangers to a decent meal'. That the boys are 'released' from the van suggests that they are like caged animals who will wreak havoc now they have been let loose, as they make 'a dash' to the empty house. The dance of the 'irate, hairy little man' kicking the car conjures a vision of 'cartoon style' behaviour, mentioned earlier, and lends an element of humour to the scene. That he is 'hairy' signifies lack of personal grooming and a suggestion of aggression, linking him to the punching and slapping boys. It is clear from their entrance that the family are unlikely to be welcome or to fit in to this respectable, cake-baking community.

(b) *The new 'garden' in paragraph 8*

There are images in this paragraph which collectively create a scene of disorder, threat and surrealism. This is previewed by the inverted commas around 'development'. The pond has a 'scummy surface' and is 'murky', suggesting it is already filthy and contains dangerous things lurking within it. The pump that 'struggled' suggests that the DIY job has not been done very efficiently, and on a deeper level that the neighbours will not be able to defeat the newcomers or even make any impression on them. The menace and darkness of the pond itself is contrasted to the garishness of the colours surrounding it. The words 'gaudy' and 'plastic' suggest cheapness and ugliness, and combine with 'concrete' to form a picture of tastelessness and artificiality. It is ironic, given that the pond represents nature and is usually an attractive feature of a garden, that it has become a symbol of artificiality and an eye sore, hence the use of inverted commas for 'garden'. Everything is fake and made from an unpleasant substance: the 'globules of cement fashioned into lumps'; the 'alligators with lolling tongues and distorted fangs'; the 'lopsided fuchsia flamingos'. Even the plants are 'plastic'. Once again the idea of a cartoon has been evoked, with everything exaggerated to the point of being amusing, at least to children. The alliterative phrases used to describe the animals, including the 'knobbly knees' of the flamingos, also add to the comic effect. The 'cacophony of high pitched whining', the 'manic spinning' of the windmills and the 'jangling' of the wind chimes convey a sense that everything is too loud, too intrusive, too bizarre, although the movement should be a welcome contrast to the unnatural immobility of the water, plants and creatures. Everything here seems to be the opposite of what one would expect and wish for in a garden; the 'development' is an assault on the senses of sight and sound which cannot be ignored or tolerated, and would provoke madness in those forced to endure it for very long. Now it is the turn of the neighbours to be irate. There is an ominous permanence about the features which implies that this creation, and therefore its creators, are here to stay.

Question 3: Summarise (a) the benefits of having Marcia Gomez as your neighbour, as described in Passage B; and (b) the annoying aspects of living next door to the new neighbours, as described in Passage A. You should write about 1 side in total, allowing for the size of your handwriting.

[20 marks]

Nearly all candidates gained more marks for part (a) than for part (b). However, Passage B proved difficult for candidates who, having already worked through two questions based on Passage A. There were fourteen possible points available and many candidates only scored about half marks, which suggested that they did not tackle the new passage with enough close reading.

Many responses included opinion and commentary, and some responses were too long, lacking concision and precision. Some responses were in descriptive/narrative style, following the structure of the passages. It is expected that summary responses will reorganise as well as re-phrase, where possible, the original material

Weak responses to part (b) wrote in general terms about the noisiness and troublesomeness of the neighbours without including the specific ways in which these annoyances were manifested. There were four separate points to be awarded for the different types of noise: van, external (equipment), internal (instruments) and pond features. Many points were therefore lost by a failure to specify.

In the best summaries, the points were re-ordered to make a coherent sequence rather than a disconnected list, which required planning.

There were however, a number of frequent weaknesses in responses as follows:

- Explaining points at great length (often as they appeared in the passage). Candidates needed to use as few words as possible to clarify a point.
- Copying whole phrases out of the original. It was not necessary to explain every single word in one's own vocabulary, however.
- Writing more than one side allowing for the size of handwriting. (The example given below would fit in less than a side if handwritten.)
- Writing in a descriptive or commentary style rather than an informative style.
- Giving information that was not focused on the question.
- Repeating the same point.
- Not making the point sufficiently clearly.

These weaknesses affected the mark given for aspects of writing. Responses which contained over long answers of two to three sides lost all their marks for writing. Many responses were concise for part (b) but answers to part (a) were not focused and lacked concision, usually resulting in a Writing mark of 2 or 3. It is important that candidates consider what the points are and do not write merely to fill the space.

When reading the following answer, candidates should note that the points are made simply and as clearly as possible, and linked together.

Passage B

Marcia has lived in the block for more than seven years, so is able to help the tenants with a variety of problems as she knows her way around. She delivers newspapers to the residents, being fit enough to walk up and down the seven floors, and assists those who need to be taken for medical treatment. She treats everyone in the complex as her family and takes no payment for her services. Instead, she organises excursions for shopping and cultural visits, and monthly movies and a bingo night held in the complex. Her energy and enthusiasm enable her to do all this and to plan more for the future in form of a grocery store and food donation scheme. As she serves on the executive committee, she is able to bring up the concerns of residents with the management. She is regarded as a friend and not just a neighbour.

Passage A

The newcomers begin by bringing the noise and pollution of their van into the neighbourhood, and add to the noise of musical instruments played inside the house and that of DIY tools used outside in the jump garden. The father's angry temperament, as displayed by his kicking his van, is shared by the dirty, badly dressed sons who fight with each other. The lack of community spirit is shown by their lack of interest in returning the friendly gestures of the locals, who are upset enough by this unneighbourly behaviour to avoid going past the house, and even to put their own house up for sale. The pond feature finally unveiled in the garden is an eyesore of plastic, concrete and lurid colour, accompanied by irritating wind chimes.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/31

Directed Writing and Composition 31

General comments

Most candidates used their time appropriately in order to answer the two questions, which had equal marks. Most of the answers to **Question 1** filled two sides, but some of the compositions lasted for three or more sides. This was rarely effective, since quality was often sacrificed to quantity, and effective planning became less evident.

It is important in responses to **Question 1** that they do not reproduce the content of the passage with very little development or evaluation of ideas. Some candidates merely copied the words from the original and could only be awarded low marks for their demonstration of reading skills.

In the composition tasks many candidates failed to use paragraphs or placed new paragraphs in inappropriate places. Paragraphing is an important element of the Content and Structure section of the Mark Scheme. They make the act of reading easier, mark new sections in the writing and add meaning.

Examiners again noted that the overall standard of spelling was high, but that many responses included frequent errors of sentences separation, using commas instead of full stops. This was often indicative of poor sentence construction, an important aspect in order to be awarded a high mark for Style and Accuracy. A few answers provided little evidence of how to use commas within sentences. Among the shortcomings of grammar and expression, it was common to see errors of tense, both where the writer changed without warning from present to past and where the more complex tenses were wrongly used.

Centres are encouraged to study the mark scheme for Content and Structure (the first grid for **Questions 2-4**) as this gives strong indications of how candidates should prepare to write effectively at a high level in each of the three genres.

Examiners again recommended that candidates should plan the structure of their answers before writing. This was particularly relevant to **Question 1** where there was much content available and two different parts of the question to answer.

A minority of Centres did not follow procedures when submitting scripts. Some pages were not fixed together at all, and as a result, candidates were in danger of losing some of their work. Other pages were presented in the wrong order which meant that Examiners had to search all the way through the script to finish marking a particular question. Occasionally a page appeared upside down. Candidates should be reminded that it is in their interests to present their scripts carefully and neatly. Examiners were grateful to some candidates whose handwriting was exceptionally clear.

Section 1: Directed writing

Question 1: Playing computer games is an enjoyable activity for many teenagers. However, some parents and teachers are concerned by the amount of time spent on these games and by the hostile content and violence contained in some of the video games. Mrs Catarina Calvet has written a personal reflection on the internet – a blog – outlining her worries about her own teenage children’s ‘unhealthy’ interest in computer games. Kofi, aged sixteen, has decided to respond to the blog, and gives his views on the subject. You are a journalist. Write an article on the subject of young people’s interest in computer games. In your article you should discuss the positive and negative aspects of playing such games and persuade readers to take a balanced view towards the use of computer games.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the content in the passage (the two blogs). Much of the writing was good. Candidates often started with a relevant and useful introduction. A paragraph of generous length expressing an overview of the problem, and showing some sympathy for both arguments was likely to contribute both to the Writing and the Reading marks. In particular, openings of this sort never copied or close-paraphrased the content, and in these responses Examiners often found sensible evaluation. Less good responses opened with a straightforward introduction, stating that there were two different views. The least good openings consisted of two or three lines that did not give any useful ideas. Most candidates then went on to provide relevant points from the blogs.

Good answers made a clear and strong selection, and the best of them classified the points as issues, such as images of violence, family life, health and exercise. Having started with one of CatCal's attacks, answers then tried to respond to the accusation using the other blog and candidates maybe added their own comment or extension to the discussion. This was written in candidate's own words and demonstrated an understanding that it was not sufficient merely to repeat the information from the passages. Some evaluation was required. These comments relate to the descriptions of performance given for Content in Bands 1 and 2 of the mark scheme for this question.

Less good answers repeated the information from the blogs, mostly in candidate's own words, and occasionally added brief comments to clarify attitudes. These answers tended to be longer than was necessary. Editing the material and adapting it to the genre of an article would have scored higher marks for Content and probably for the quality of the writing.

Weak responses selected points 'rather literally' (Band 4) or repeated material 'injudiciously' (Band 5). Although some responses included 'unselective copying' (Band 6), the mark of 0 was not given. Common examples of copying from the text were the phrases, 'the world of fantasy, demons and violent criminals', 'glued to their games consoles', 'problem solve, negotiate tactics' and 'learn better via a computer'. Candidates should be strongly discouraged from any copying from the passage. Examiners always assumed that the habit was an indication that the language had not been understood.

The most challenging part of the question was the final one, 'persuade readers to take a balanced view towards the use of computer games'. Some responses ignored this section or did not tackle the concept of a 'balanced view'. Good responses argued the need to move with the times and understand that the computer had changed the lives of young people compared with those of their parents. Parents therefore had to embrace this new world but they also had to exert their influence as parents. This meant knowing what their children were up to, giving them a varied family and social life, and joining in with the computer games bearing in mind that they were not all violent or dangerous.

Responses which did not attempt to follow some sort of argument did not demonstrate the ability to go beyond reproducing content from the passage. Apart from the summary in Paper 21, none of the questions in this syllabus encourage candidates to do this, and those who did scored low marks.

Answers which followed the format of introduction, use of content and discussion of balance, wrote a well structured article. Many seemed very comfortable writing in the style of an article, although only the best made the material their own. Candidates were able to add sensibly to the passage by quoting and briefly describing games that they had played and were able to integrate their own knowledge into the article. It was rare to find candidates who wrote their own response using the passage as a general stimulus which was not the intention of this question.

The marks for the quality of the writing were therefore often quite high, rewarding Structure and Style. There was some mature and assured writing with accurate and ambitious spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **Some people claim to have seen UFOs (unidentified flying objects) such as flying saucers. Do you believe it is possible for such things to exist? What might be the consequences for us if they do?**
- (b) **Do you think criminals are treated too harshly or too leniently?**

Many candidates wrote responses to these topics, and the standard of Content and Structure was higher than in previous sessions. These were topics that were of interest to candidates and much of the writing was

knowledgeable. For example in (a) some had read the recent exciting comments by Professor Hawking and were able to include them in their argument. There were several sensible scientific and comparatively few comments that had no basis or likelihood. Many candidates answered the last part of the topic appropriately and even speculated that aliens might be of benefit as well as a danger. Candidates answering (b) were able to reflect the views of their own countries about the treatment of criminals, and some of the arguments were strong. It was interesting that so few candidates were prepared to give a liberal view of crime and punishment, but many did not understand that education and training were there for a purpose.

The Examiners saw some well argued complex arguments (Band 1) and fewer examples of writing where the 'order of the stages in the overall argument can be changed without adverse effect' (Band 3). If candidates followed the set up of the questions, they were able to write in an orderly way. However, there were examples of responses in (b) that moved between harsh and lenient without a coherent structure. As in previous sessions, there were some answers that ran out of ideas after less than a side, and repeated themselves or became confused. Examiners recommend that before embarking on answers to **Question 2**, candidates should construct a plan.

Candidates are reminded of the importance of constructing their responses in paragraphs. Some did not use paragraphs at all and others used many short paragraphs where four or five for the whole piece of writing would have been appropriate. Where paragraphs were of only three or four lines it was rare that ideas were properly argued to their conclusions. However, the practice of constructing paragraphs with two or even three unconnected ideas should also be discouraged.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

- (a) **Describe a time or place (real or imaginary) when you felt so embarrassed that it still makes you feel uncomfortable to this day. Describe how you felt and how other people reacted.**
- (b) **You are walking home alone when you notice signs of a storm gathering around you. Describe what happens and how you feel as you make your way to shelter.**

While there is an element of narrative in the descriptions set in this section of the paper, it is intended that the time span should be very short. The greater part of the writing should be descriptive of objects and sensations, and the writer's feelings should be carefully explored. Hence the moment of embarrassment, for instance in (a) did not require a long preamble.

One account was of a new boy at a School who feared getting his marks back from a chemistry test. At the end of the lesson the teacher revealed that he had scored 13%. The moment of embarrassment was when he left the classroom only to be confronted by the rest of the class who jeered at him. The final paragraph, probably the best, was as he looked back on this incident. Now he was popular in the School but he still hated chemistry. Much of the writing which led up to the moment of embarrassment was not strictly necessary.

A second example described a whole series of events at a kindergarten. They involved the storyteller who laughed at the antics of a little boy and spattered him with some milk. Later, the storyteller was hit in the eye with a ball and finally fell off the swings, which was the little boy's revenge. Although there was a little description in this writing, it really classified as a narrative.

Better examples were those that took the reader straight to the stage where, for example, a young girl or boy was trying desperately to remember the words of a poem or a song. More than one example of this theme brought out the sheer terror of facing an audience. These were often good because they focused on the one event and the main emotion.

Responses to (b) were somewhat better, although the imaginary ones were sometimes too full of descriptive detail. Most of them started with clouds, then the wind, then darkness and lastly, the downpour. The effect on the unfortunate person caught in the storm was often the best part. Some were set in other contexts such as the end of a School day and missing the bus, and these were effective. Another candidate was bringing the groceries home when she noticed a cloud, 'big and puffy like cotton ... a kind of happy cloud'. She then described how other clouds of the same type appeared and mingled, changing into threatening storm clouds. The wind whistled 'like a banshee' and everything went black. The wind lifted the grocery bag and the contents flew all over the road. This was a very original description, and the candidate kept her eye on the relevant and necessary details throughout the writing.

While there was a case for not writing a description in paragraphs, it was nearly always wise to do so. The description invariably had different stages. Where the images were complicated, paragraphs helped the reader in comprehending the picture.

Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a) “Alex was someone who liked to live life ‘on the edge’ for too long, barely managing to survive. Now, in desperation, s(he) would do *anything...*’. Use this quotation as the start of a story.
- (b) Write a story in which fire plays an essential part.

As in previous sessions, there were stories that were based on an imaginative idea and stories that consisted of events which were often strung together with little convincing detail. It is recommended that candidates 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 best responses, however, were those which included details that were important and omitted the irrelevant. For example, one candidate provided the reader with contrasting character studies of Alex and his shy girl friend. Alex decided he would swim the English Channel. His girl friend who was too timid to travel anywhere, suddenly left to go and wait for him on the beach at Calais. There was an excellent description of how Alex first became weary and then drowned, and a final tragic image of the girl waiting for him, alone on the beach. There were many details that did not quite fit, but the story excited interest and had a truly sad ending.

In contrast, stories such as those of a house fire where the teenager insisted on entering and re-entering the blazing inferno to rescue the mother’s jewellery, the cat and the mobile phone, were not only unreal, but became successions of events without any original description to engage the reader. Where, as normally happened, the story was imaginary, it was essential that the writer had enough skill, through descriptive passages or the presentation of a character’s feelings, to persuade the reader that the narrative was real. One response which had a camp fire as the setting for a visitation by the spirit of a friend who had died achieved reality. On the other hand, where the story was based on experience, it was sometimes important to add some creative but plausible details to prevent ordinariness.

One of the best stories was a monologue spoken by an arsonist. This person believed that the world was evil because of the pursuit of gasoline and had arranged a spectacular fire in a twenty-storey building. In the midst of this disaster there were two more stages to be set off by the flick of a switch, ending in mass destruction including, apparently, himself. Another excellent story was about a relationship that was the fire. The two people could never stop arguing but could never leave each other.

In another story, Alex, his teenage brother and a little sister played near a cliff. Alex pretended to be trapped and told his sister to call the brother. He then told him it was a trick. Soon after Alex slipped and this time the brother did not believe him until it was too late. Simple stories such as this often worked, provided that there were attractive descriptions and that the ending was managed well. Stories about how a chemistry experiment went wrong and a boy’s polyester jumper caught fire, or about a pink ashtray with a warning message, which failed to hold a live cigarette end, were quite impressive.

As in previous sessions, high marks for Style and Accuracy rewarded candidates who demonstrated a wide range of vocabulary and the ability to construct varied and fluent sentences. There were sometimes more errors in the composition section of the paper.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/32

Directed Writing and Composition 32

General comments

Most candidates used their time appropriately in order to answer the two questions, which had equal marks. Most of the answers to **Question 1** filled two sides, but some of the compositions lasted for three or more sides. The latter tended to consist of narratives that had not been effectively planned beforehand. Descriptive pieces were generally short, either because they were succinct or owing to lack of attention to detail.

It is important in responses to **Question 1** that they do not reproduce the content of the passage with very little development or evaluation of ideas. Some candidates merely copied the words from the original and could only be awarded low marks for their demonstration of reading skills.

In the composition tasks many candidates failed to use paragraphs or placed new paragraphs in inappropriate places. Paragraphing is an important element of the Content and Structure section of the Mark Scheme. They make the act of reading easier, mark new sections in the writing and add meaning.

Examiners again noted that the overall standard of spelling was high, but that many responses included frequent errors of sentences separation, using commas instead of full stops. This was often indicative of poor sentence construction, an important aspect in order to be awarded a high mark for Style and Accuracy. A few answers provided little evidence of how to use commas within sentences. Among the shortcomings of grammar and expression, it was common to see errors of tense, both where the writer changed without warning from present to past and where the more complex tenses were wrongly used, particularly in discursive writing.

Centres are encouraged to study the mark scheme for Content and Structure (the first grid for **Questions 2-4**) as this gives strong indications of how candidates should prepare to write effectively at a high level in each of the three genres.

Examiners again recommended that candidates should plan the structure of their answers before writing. This was particularly relevant to **Question 1** where there was much content available and two different parts of the question to answer.

A minority of Centres did not follow procedures when submitting scripts. Some pages were not fixed together at all, and as a result, candidates were in danger of losing some of their work. Other pages were presented in the wrong order which meant that Examiners had to search all the way through the script to finish marking a particular question. Occasionally a page appeared upside down. Candidates should be reminded that it is in their interests to present their scripts carefully and neatly. Examiners were grateful to some candidates whose handwriting was exceptionally clear. Exceptions were those candidates whose writing was very small, set close together and lacking sufficient gaps between questions and paragraphs.

Section 1: Directed writing

Question 1: You are a senior candidate at your School. You have a chance to talk to Roberta, a lively 82-year-old, and Samuel, who is 16, and find out how the scheme works for them in their town. Write the words of a talk that you give to candidates at your School during an assembly or morning meeting. In your talk, you should: explain what Roberta and Samuel gain from the scheme; persuade your fellow candidates that it would benefit both them and the wider community if they took part.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the content in the passage (the two transcripts). Much of the writing was good. All candidates sought an appropriate address to the School and their colleagues and many of these introductions were attempted to engage their audience. A rhetorical paragraph, directing a series of questions concerning a type of stereotypical thinking fellow teenagers may secretly harbour about the elderly, was a useful and clever introduction as it offered an excellent way to explore how, in turn, the elderly might feel about teenagers; a perfect reading cue for Roberta's transcript. This approach avoided flat, lengthy outlines regarding old and young people in society and why they often did not interact, and used the proper conventions of a speech or informal talk. Less successful openings tried hard to introduce not only the two characters, but also their ages, situations and how they became involved in the scheme called 'Building Bridges', yet lost a sense of 'voice' and style by resorting to paraphrasing. Strong evaluative openings with sound, implicit points, not only provided grounding for the second prompt, but contributed both to the quality of writing and content mark. Examiners commented that good introductions such as these facilitated a more immediate engagement with the text.

Most responses often went on to deal with each transcript separately, but there were also excellent examples of integrated speeches that moved seamlessly between both.

Good answers selected key issues from both transcripts that illustrated how Roberta and Samuel's lives had been enriched by each others' presence. This included a shift in attitudes; Samuel's good manners and trustworthiness served to open Roberta's eyes to the fact that her previous fears may have been the by-product of judging teenagers merely on their appearance. On the other hand, Samuel's views were not just influenced by the fact that he had a healthy respect for older people borne out of a good relationship with his grandmother, now deceased, but because he enjoyed Roberta's intelligent and lively company. Better responses inferred that Samuel's understanding about the past and experience of old people had been enriched by the discovery of Roberta's exciting and daredevil years. It was deemed to be a privilege for someone starting out in life to be able to not just learn, but be inspired by what many candidates regarded as 'living history' figures. Good answers handled the topic of Samuel helping Roberta with her bills and budgeting as implying he was maturing and becoming someone who could be trusted through his experience of 'Building Bridges'. In many ways, it was easier for responses to just concentrate on Roberta's improved lifestyle: company at last, outings, excuses to make cakes, visits to Samuel's family, for example. However, better responses evaluated the text and recognised that the scheme had brought Roberta out of herself socially by reawakening the exciting person she used to be, including the chess champion, helicopter pilot and women's rights campaigning details in their response. Examiners were impressed by the fact that many candidates were extremely perceptive and thorough in their approach, and that they also showed maturity and empathy in their writing.

Less good answers were sometimes rather familiar or 'chatty' in their introductions, the use of 'you guys' for example, and tended to slant both the reading and the writing towards a charity drive 'to help old people out there'. This resulted in the emphasis being on what Samuel 'did' for Roberta and limited the selection of reading material to a one-sided approach or a list of the things Roberta now had in her life that she did not have before. The lack of evaluation here was evident, especially when the persuasive element of the second prompt was attempted, for here candidates merely exhorted fellow candidates to 'help the poor old people' and it was obvious that they had not considered any benefits for Samuel, in spite of citing visits to museums and 'listening to interesting stories'.

Weak answers selected points 'rather literally' (Band 4), although there were not many who found it difficult to outline a basic, clear response to the first prompt. Weakness in language use prevented some answers from explaining clearly what benefits Roberta and Samuel gained from the scheme, even though they were able to extract the main 'social' aspects, albeit in a paraphrased fashion.

The second prompt, 'persuade your fellow candidates that the scheme would benefit them and the wider community if they took part', was often integrated into the main body of the answer, although the points made were generally tagged on to the types of activities Roberta and Samuel participated in. However, the vast majority of responses dealt with the persuasive purpose of the task with varying degrees of rhetoric and emotive language. Some used Samuel's voice, as a visiting speaker, to 'spread the word' and this worked well, especially if he did not alienate the teenage audience by talking about 'charity work', instead of evaluating how much he had changed as an individual and discussing how essential it was to metaphorically 'build bridges' by initially being prepared to banish stereotyping. Examiners commented that there were some mature writers who wrote well-crafted persuasive pieces about the generation gap between the old and teenagers. However, these read more like discursive essays and included tenuous links to the text. Reading marks here, regrettably, were obviously much lower than those pieces closely tethered to the text.

In general, responses which followed the format of introduction, use of content and discussion, and a conclusion, were well written. Many candidates wrote a well structured speech. Most seemed very comfortable writing a speech and had clearly thought about their topic. Some used a range of some effective devices to assist them in doing so. They were able to use anecdote, by quoting others, to support their views, and occasionally elaborating, and to integrate their own views into the speech. The marks for quality of writing were therefore often quite high, rewarding structure and style. There was some mature and assured writing with accurate and ambitious spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **'Some people spend far too much time and money on household pets. They would do better to have fewer animals and to use the money to help the poor and needy.'** What are your views?
- (b) **'Life is all about competition. To get ahead in almost every aspect of life we inevitably trample on others to get what we want.'** Discuss this view and give your opinion.

A few candidates wrote responses to these topics. However, the content and structure varied considerably. In general, it is important to have sufficient knowledge in order to embark on topics that require not just the views of others, but also some sense of personal viewpoint. Although there were some interesting anecdotes and examples in both responses, Examiners often commented that candidates were unable to identify and develop the main ideas that would have provided clear and knowledgeable debate in either question. However, certain strands of argument in (a) explored predominantly celebrity pet owners, for whom money is no object when it comes to their 'pampered pooches'. Answers were able to go into detail regarding the cost of diamond-studded collars, and the fact that beauty salons and even 'pet hotels' are big business in the world of Hollywood and beyond. Better answers cited a worrying trend borne out of this and that 'ordinary' people were actually getting themselves into debt in a bid to 'stay in fashion'. There were some humorous examples of dogs dressed up as Elvis for example, but few answers focussed on interrogating the entire topic and moving the argument on to incorporate the ethics of a society which can see this as 'a bit of fun' whilst the divide between the rich and poor continues to increase. Some candidates did see a fundamental flaw in the argument, saying that there was no guarantee that the type of people who over-indulge pets would automatically give their money to the 'poor and needy' instead. There were also many basic misconceptions from the outset, such as poor people are poor because they are too lazy to make a living.

There were better responses to (b). The best responses analysed the question and highlighted areas where the sense of competition seemed most virulent: work, wealth, University and School. A number supported Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' and accepted that 'trampling' was inevitable, although a few commented on the ruthlessness of society and attempted to discuss the value of teamwork and the fact that we are 'social beings'. Unfortunately, there were a few socio-economic essays that did not include any essence of personal response in the discussion.

To award high marks, Examiners were looking for well developed, logical and coherent arguments that included personal engagement. Examiners saw many examples of writing where 'the order of the stages in the overall argument can be changed without adverse effect' (Band 3). Examiners were looking for developed paragraphs and evenly linked arguments to award higher marks. As in previous sessions, there were some answers that ran out of ideas after less than a side, and repeated themselves or became confused. Examiners recommend that before embarking on answers to **Question 2**, candidates should construct a plan.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

- (a) **Describe three moments in a race; the start, the middle and the finish.**
- (b) **Describe the time when you mastered a skill such as unicycling, skateboarding, skiing, cooking or even plate spinning. Describe what you were trying to do, and your thoughts and feelings at the final moment of success.**

While there is an element of narrative in the descriptions set in this section of the paper, it is intended that the time span should be very short. The greater part of the writing should be descriptive of objects and sensations, and the writer's feelings should be carefully explored. Hence, neither of these required a long

preamble, although there is a place for an initial description of the setting as this helps to set the scene and focus on the occasion.

For example, in response to **(a)**, one account was of a swimming race, but instead of setting the scene the piece concentrated on the boy's anxiety the night before. However, another candidate also writing about a swimming race, provided a plethora of detail – the pungent smell of chlorine, the distorted cacophony of sound and a panoramic photograph of worried faces all through the eyes of the participant as he was about to dive and start the race. The present tense seemed to work best in this composition because of the immediacy, although candidates are reminded that care needs to be taken not to overuse the same vocabulary type such as 'adrenalin coursed through my veins', 'sheen of sweat', 'heart bursting through my ribcage' as it loses the initial impact. There were some well crafted descriptive races from the perspective of a racehorse or greyhound and these provided even more scope for effective detail. Others involved Formula One races, though the best of these were usually first-person accounts. A few responses consciously used cohesive devices at the beginning and the end; the 'boiling sun' at the start became a 'soothing sun' at the end to reflect the sense of victory, or, as in one response, the 'blinding sun' became the 'dazzling medal' at the end.

Describing the mastering of a skill in response to **(b)** proved to be more challenging for candidates overall. Here, unfortunately, many responses started with narrative beginnings. The skill of writing about something that is repeated is perhaps to start in the middle of a failed attempt. For example, successful responses included the plate just starting to rotate and gain momentum, the skateboard which is suddenly straight and smooth or all three juggling balls are in mid air. Then comes the crash, the disappointment, the carnage. There were some clever and immediate descriptions of tight rope walking, one amusing piece on making onion soup and an excellent piece on a Japanese tea ceremony.

For **(a)** and **(b)**, paragraphs assisted in making these descriptions easier to follow; they provided logic when the description had different stages and assisted the reader in comprehending the picture.

Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a) Write a story in which the main character is trying to cross a border to safety.**
- (b) 'Everyone was talking about the new teacher at School. There was something different about her, something strange about her eyes that frightened people...' Use this to begin your story.**

Responses to **(a)** were successful. The more competent responses concentrated on the protagonist's dilemma, and a good sense of characterisation was a key element. The focus on a 'border', in many different guises, provided a strong, narrative device that often propelled straightforward writing towards an exciting climax. Examiners were often impressed by the evocation of a sense of place; from Mexico to the United States or from Pakistan to India. Many descriptions of inhospitable desert regions, mountainous terrain or treacherous waters provided the backdrop and initial setting for the best narratives.

Less strong were those stories that had too much back story or preamble; the best answers always presented the most important aspects and omitted the irrelevant. While there were many accounts that tended to stretch credibility: climbing electric fences, dodging whole patrols firing bullets or surviving shark infested waters, there was excitement and often a satisfactory climax to most stories. Sustaining tension was often quite difficult for less ambitious writers, but the fact that getting across the border itself could be seen as the climax, in many ways, gave the language more purpose and prevented distractions that can sometimes occur when candidates have not planned how the response will end. Occasionally, there were unexpected responses such as a patient in a coma, aware of his surroundings, struggling to blink or move a finger to cross the 'border' back in to the land of the living. Another impressive story was told in the voice of a wolf who escaped the confines of a reservation, only to be shot at and pursued until the reserve's boundary fence became the 'border to safety'.

The story about the teacher, **(b)**, was a popular choice and differentiated well. The abundance of werewolf and vampire novels and films proved to be irresistible to many candidates. The same conventions of story telling were expected to apply here, yet many candidates did not develop the piece to lead up to the climax. Few narratives were convincing. Many responses started well, accurately evoking the atmosphere of the classroom, but resorted to rather clichéd events. One or two narrators were confided in by the teacher who was revealed to have a rather sad back story. Stories here were often badly proportioned, with over half of the account devoted to descriptions of clothes, handbags, hair and voices, and then just a hurried piece of

action. It is recommended that candidates could study some short stories to learn how writers introduce characters and settings, build up the suspense in the narrative and manage the climax.

As in previous sessions, high marks for Style and Accuracy rewarded candidates who demonstrated a range of vocabulary and the ability to construct varied and fluent sentences. There were sometimes minor errors in the composition section of the paper.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/33

Directed Writing and Composition 33

General comments

Most candidates used their time effectively to produce complete answers to the two questions, which had equal marks. Most answers to **Question 1** filled two sides, which was sufficient and appropriate, but some of the compositions ran into more than three sides of A4. The latter tended to consist of narratives that had not been effectively planned beforehand.

It is important in responses to **Question 1** that they do not reproduce the content of the passage with very little development or evaluation of ideas. Disappointingly, there were a few discursive responses which focussed on a couple of emotive issues.

In the composition tasks many candidates failed to use paragraphs or placed new paragraphs in inappropriate places. Paragraphing is an important element of the Content and Structure section of the Mark Scheme. They make the act of reading easier, mark new sections in the writing and add meaning. However, there were instances, particularly in discursive writing, when the main area of weakness was a failure to progress the argument by linking paragraphs, leading to a series of isolated, interchangeable points.

Examiners again noted that the overall standard of spelling was high, but that many responses included frequent errors of sentences separation, using commas instead of full stops. This was often indicative of poor sentence construction, an important aspect in order to be awarded a high mark for Style and Accuracy. A few answers provided little evidence of how to use commas within sentences, and dashes were used indiscriminately. There were instances of confusion in grammar and expression, and it was common to see errors of tense, both where the writer changed from past to present and where the more complex tenses were used.

Centres are encouraged to study the mark scheme for Content and Structure (the first grid for **Questions 2-4**) as this gives strong indications of how candidates should prepare to write effectively at a high level in each of the three genres.

Examiners again recommended that candidates should plan the structure of their answers before writing. This was particularly relevant to **Question 1** where there was much content available and two different parts of the question to answer.

Section 1: Directed writing

Question 1: Read the following transcript of a radio broadcast in which Maria Gracias gives her views on how young people should be raised. Write a letter to Maria Gracias in which you disagree with what she says. In your letter you should: examine some of the points she makes; develop your own arguments against them.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of the writing and 10 for the use of the content in the transcript. Much of the writing was lively and quite engaging. Responses often started with a relevant and useful introduction, but there were quite a few instances of immediate confrontational questions that would have probably worked better once an overview had been established.

Stronger responses played 'devil's advocate' and pretended to understand Maria Gracias' strong views, in the first instance; however, they gradually proceeded to unpick her arguments in subsequent paragraphs. Less good responses opened with a straightforward introduction stating that they had heard 'her show' and that they were about to tell her why her views were 'wrong'.

Most candidates managed to deal with what they regarded to be the most controversial aspect of the broadcast.

Good answers included a clear, strong selection of points, and the best of them classified the 'generation gap' issues, such as ideas of 'thrift', banning mobile phones and staying in to play board games. The fact that the presenter in the broadcast merely highlighted a few rebuttals in response to Maria Gracías' views gave candidates the opportunity to tackle points in their own words, at length and from a strong position. The best answers were those which, rather than give a quick reaction, considered the perspective of the broadcaster and attempted to understand her generation's ideas, almost placating her at times, before evaluating what she had to say, producing reasoned arguments, with relevant personal examples. This type of answer relates to the descriptions of performance given for reading in Bands 1 and 2 of the Mark Scheme for this question.

Less good responses systematically went through the generalisations made and, in a rather disjointed manner, argued briefly about each one. The end result lacked cohesion. For example, one letter asked 'You say children have too easy a time, but how do you know as you do not have children?' before moving on to another generalisation. While the selection and understanding here was good, too often the lack of development and evaluation suppressed both the content and the quality of writing marks. Responses lacked development of content. A few candidates went back over their work and added a couple of relevant ideas in the margins, illustrating a lack of planning.

Weak answers selected points 'rather literally' (Band 4) or repeated the words of the broadcaster without adding more than a very brief 'but this isn't fair' type response. Others focussed on a point, particularly the idea of teenagers 'roaming around town', and began to talk about this as though this were a discursive essay, disregarding the rest of the broadcast and therefore not picking up other essential reading points.

The best responses were those from candidates who spent sufficient time reading the text, selecting the most relevant and often the most 'old fashioned' ideas, and picking up on the inconsistencies in Maria Gracías' arguments. Astute and mature responses challenged points about not allowing children to 'talk nonsense and get excited and cheeky', but expecting them 'by the age of thirteen or fourteen' to 'at least add something to an adult conversation'. Silencing, or not involving children in adult conversations at a young age would not give them sufficient confidence to join in at a later stage in their development, many responses countered. Mature evaluation of controversial ideas, such as teenagers 'roaming around the town' because they had been spoiled by receiving too much spending money, did involve sound personal responses that developed ideas, but still remained tethered to the text.

In general, candidates who followed the format of introduction, use of content and discussion of perspective and mutual understanding, wrote a well structured article and achieved good marks on content. The marks for writing were occasionally quite high, rewarding structure and style. There was some mature and assured writing with accurate and ambitious spelling, grammar and punctuation. However, there was evidence of careless errors in punctuation and sentence structure marring some potentially effective pieces.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) Imagine yourself in ten years' time. Explain three or four different ways in which your life will have changed.**
- (b) Write an article in which you argue the case for keeping yourself healthy. Explain three or four ways to keep yourself as healthy as possible.**

Many candidates wrote responses to these topics, and although there was clarity and an effective overview of ideas in each, they often lacked 'vision' or a sense of adventure that might have lifted them out of the ordinary. These straightforward topics interested the candidates, but often the responses lacked the vigour, detail and development expected of this type of writing. Responses to **(a)** often took a linear approach of: university, job, wife and children. While it was acceptable to outline one's own life in this fashion, opportunities were not taken to explain or develop reasons behind future choices and it was this rationale that could have added more character, personality and interest to these pieces.

Candidates answering **(b)** wrote quite detailed informative pieces, so there was a wealth of material on diet, exercise and not harming the body by smoking or drinking to excess. Only a few candidates responded in the form of an article; it was expected that there would be sufficient attention to the style and language of the

in order to make it accessible and interesting for the audience. Some responses used humour and showed a mature understanding of the human condition by hijacking the types of excuses that are given to avoid following advice offered. These were entertaining and fun; they also included sufficient detailed argument to lift them out of informative writing. On the other hand, there were many straightforward outlines that reflected the type of essay which may be given in Physical Education. These were purely educational accounts and often the sub-headings revealed the informative nature of these pieces.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

- (a) Describe a fire from the signs of smoke to the moment when it is out of control.
- (b) Describe nightfall as you reach camp in the middle of the jungle.

While there is an element of narrative in the descriptions set in this section of the paper, it is intended that the time span should still be fairly short. The greater part of the writing should be descriptive of place, objects and sensations, and the writer's feelings should be carefully explored.

There were some effective responses to (a) in which forest fires often began with an animal sniffing the air, and sensing something wrong and causing a frenzy of flight that alerted the onlooker. There was immediacy and interest in this type of introduction as opposed to other pieces that spent a paragraph outlining where the person was, who was with them and what they were doing until 'suddenly I smelled something burning'. Some of the descriptions of the fires were figurative, from 'tongues' of flames to snakes wrapping around tinder dry wood, to fire-breathing dragons overpowering and creating their own domain. The strongest responses left the blaze 'out of control' as the reader felt the force of this fully animated 'creature'. Less strong answers felt it important to reassure, so there were often the sounds of sirens in the distance, but these still left the reader quite satisfied. Weak responses simply told the story of being a witness to a fire and although there were some details and description, the driving force was purely narrative.

There were also some effective descriptive essays in response to (b) although this was, to a certain extent, challenging for candidates to focus on as there were three separate aspects that they had to divide their time describing: nightfall, camp and the jungle (perhaps four if one were to consider the trek to the camp as well). The strongest answers were those that cleverly created the setting very early on and many candidates successfully dealt with the loud whine of mosquitoes, oversized insects dropping from lush treetops and the incessant noise of an alien environment. Camp was epitomised as a beacon of safety, the fire here heart warming, but a warning to predators that seemed to encircle the few humans present. Many candidates' descriptions of the jungle were very specific and added to the menace of the impending nightfall that apparently dropped suddenly like a light being switched off leaving everyone in pitch darkness, apart from the shadows of the fire. These were really enjoyable accounts and there were few that did not succeed in sustaining the descriptive focus, especially in the main part of the account.

Examiners commented on the fact that paragraphs assisted in making these descriptions easier to follow, but also logical when the description had different stages. Where the images were complicated, paragraphing assisted the reader in comprehending the picture.

Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a) Tell the story of a rich person who woke up one morning to find that wealth had turned to extreme poverty.
- (b) Tell the story of what happened on the first night of a School play through the eyes of one of the actors OR somebody working behind the scenes.

There were some fairly ambitious attempts to handle the narrative outlined in (a). However, the biggest challenge was the time shift of 'waking up one morning and suddenly being poor' as this seemed to be out of the candidates' realm of understanding. Many candidates tended to retrace their steps and start the story at a point when business was doing well and then gradually made their way to bankruptcy, and then the panic that ensued was easier for them to deal with. There were various reasons for the abrupt change in fortune, but these were rarely explained properly, although there were many corrupt uncles or brothers who emerged out of nowhere and suddenly took over in rather unsatisfactory 'coups'. Often the focal point, the main protagonist whose change in circumstances was the driving force of the narrative, was very sketchily drawn and it would have added greatly to the narratives to witness a change in not only the circumstances, but in the physical, mental and overall demeanour of this vital character. Endings were often quite weak and

insubstantial, although there were a few 'Scarface' and 'Godfather' accounts with an equally replacing the rather benign, but still corrupt, rich drug dealer.

The most enjoyable, humorous and entertaining narratives were in response to **(b)**. There were not many of these, perhaps because they best suited specific candidates who may have studied drama or have taken part in plays. The attention to character was often superb, especially when accompanied by rather theatrical voices in dialogue exchange. The narratives themselves were often simple in construction, but the chain of events and unravelling of great ideas gone wrong were very cleverly handled. These stories were often carefully planned, so not only did they sustain interest and credibility, but the climax was also cleverly handled and left the reader satisfied. Dialogue could be followed, though often there was inaccurate use of speech marks and punctuation in general, but nothing too serious to detract from the actual content.

Candidates are reminded of the importance of constructing their responses in paragraphs. Some did not use paragraphs at all and others used many short paragraphs where four or five for the whole piece of writing would have been appropriate. Where paragraphs were of only three or four lines it was rare that ideas were properly argued to their conclusions. However, the practice of constructing paragraphs with two or even three unconnected ideas should also be discouraged.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

The standard of the work from the candidates who entered for this component was again high and many Centres had evidently planned their coursework with great care. There was more evidence of personal writing in this session, which is important if the intention of coursework is to help young learners to become good writers, expressing their own ideas in their own voices and styles. Writing can become a delight, a source of pride and self-esteem, and not a chore.

In the first Assignment, more candidates expressed their personal feelings about an increasing range of issues and experiences and in the third, controversial articles allowed them to argue cases with some fervour against what they read. A wide range of fiction, poetry with commentaries and an increasing amount of effective description, especially of people and places, was also submitted.

As in previous years, the choice of texts for the third Assignment caused problems for some Centres. There was also some lack of application of the mark scheme to determine the assessment of reading and in these cases, Moderators made frequent adjustments where the quality of the response to reading did not fit the grade descriptions. Centres are directed to the 2011 Syllabus general guidance on the coursework portfolio (page 20) and to the Grade Descriptions for Reading (page 28) for further guidance.

Moderators would also like to remind Centres to the use of the draft, which is required for one of the assignments. Drafts should be working documents which show evidence of editing and revision by the candidate in order to improve the final version. Centres are also reminded again that teachers should not correct drafts, but offer general advice prompting candidates to improve their work.

Assessment

As in previous sessions, assessment was generally sound and only a few Centres' marks were very obviously too generous or severe. Rank orders were generally correct. Internal moderation had clearly been carried out, and on many occasions with great care.

The most frequent reason for adjustment was the reading mark in Assignment 3. A common error was giving high marks to candidates who had not discussed ideas and opinions from the text but who had in effect summarised them. Some candidates had been given high marks but had only used the text as a stimulus for their own ideas and had not demonstrated understanding of what they had read.

For writing, the quantity of errors in the Assignment was sometimes not taken into consideration. Given the unique opportunities afforded by coursework, candidates scoring high marks in Bands 1 and 2 should be making few or no mistakes. Unlike those taking the examined component, candidates can correct spelling electronically and proofread their work at their leisure. Yet, Moderators found that candidates who had been awarded marks at the top of Band 1 were nevertheless making sentence separation errors or writing in unvaried and generally short sentences. Centres are reminded that the discriminators at high levels are a wide range of appropriate language and the ability to write varied and sometimes complex sentences. Conversely, some candidates who demonstrated these abilities and who made no errors had been given too few marks.

Submitting the portfolios

Moderators would like to remind Centres that they should not send work in individual plastic folders. The work should be fixed to the Individual Candidate Record Card by means of a paper clip or a staple. The marks appearing on the Individual Candidate Record Card should be the final internally moderated marks both for reading and for writing. The candidate number and the name of the teaching group should be filled in to provide this information for the Moderator.

Drafts

The requirement to include a draft of one of the assignments is important. The draft is meant to demonstrate what happens in the teaching process as a piece of writing is prepared and improved. Some Centres submitted drafts where it was very difficult to determine any changes that the candidate had made between the two versions. Some drafts carried simple comments by teachers with only a little advice. Some drafts, however, had been double-spaced, leaving room for the candidate to make improvements and changes sometimes in different coloured pens. These showed the candidate's full involvement with the work. Changes included the rewriting of sentences and phrases to make them more effective or clear (editing). In some cases, whole sections had been changed to improve the structure and content (revising). Correcting and proofreading changes made by the candidate were evident. It was this sort of attention to the early drafts that showed the candidates' commitment to their writing.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

The choice of topics was encouragingly wider than in previous years. More Centres had thought about encouraging candidates to write about what interested them and what they knew about. Moderators were pleased to see less of topics such as Cloning, Animal Testing, Capital Punishment, Euthanasia and Abortion, which can be repetitive and lack reader engagement. There were also fewer research essays, with or without lists of websites. On the few occasions that these were submitted, it was difficult for the Moderator to assess how much of the work was truly original and how much was at least a near paraphrase of the source material.

Encouragingly, many of the choices were interesting and appeared to be candidate's own personal writing. An assignment on Chinese food was authentic and intriguing to read. Another candidate wrote about drums and there was a piece about the benefits of tattoos. One candidate lamented the decline of small shops and another pretended to be a head teacher explaining why he was banning coursework from his school. One assignment discussed the use of laptops in the classroom and another asked the question 'Is Google making us 'stupid'?' One Centre had conducted an excellent study of the Gothic in 19th-century art, architecture and literature, and the candidates made their own leaflet on the topic. It was pleasing that no two versions of the leaflets were the same. There were guides to Egypt and Sao Paulo and candidates in two African Centres wrote with personal involvement about local affairs such as 'Are Africans the Cause of their own Problems?', 'Africa's Young Footballers and Afro Hair'.

Many candidates wrote engagingly in a speech format. These pieces were frequently lively and rhetorical and full of pithy argument. Topics included drinking and driving, the importance of the parental role and gun control. One assignment took the form of a speech given on sport in school at a Governors' meeting.

Finally, there were many accounts of visits, such as a May week trip to Berlin, and exchange visits to countries with different cultures. There was an excellent account of a visit to a holocaust exhibition. Of course, candidates had to be careful that topics such as these were different from the second assignment and this was achieved by assessing the reactions to the visits.

It was pleasing to see some really original topics that were exciting and interesting to candidates and that allowed them to write at their best.

Assignment 2

Most responses to this assignment were appropriate and fit for purpose, and some excellent fiction and personal writing was produced. Many Centres had taken the advice to study the genre before setting the task. There were some first-rate ghost stories from one Centre and others chose Gothic stories or tales of suspense. These were nearly always better than stories of cops, robbers and drug barons, which did not necessarily provide content which made the pieces stand out.

Moderators were not aware whether the title of a piece was decided before or after the story was written, but some of the best were Malignant Mountain, Perfectly Painless, Who Would have Guessed?, And the Lift Doors Opened, and To the Earth and Back Again. These stories were usually well constructed and particular attention was paid to the endings.

Some of the best writing was about people and places. Places included the Gobi Desert, Sierra Leone, New York and a description of a horse market. There were many autobiographical fragments, most of which were chosen and engaging to a reader.

For the second year, some Centres wrote stories 'from two perspectives', and these were again very interesting and entertaining to read.

There were some original poems together with interesting commentaries on how they came to be written and why the writer chose particular words and images.

This assignment is the one where candidates were at their freest to write as they wanted, and the Moderators were delighted to see experimental and unusual writing, and the desire to be original.

Assignment 3

This assignment was not always done well or assessed correctly. Centres are asked to check the 2011 Syllabus and to ensure that they understand what is required, namely that the choice of texts 'must contain facts, opinions and/or arguments which can be analysed and evaluated by the candidate' (page 20). In addition, the Grade descriptors for Reading (page 28) refer to the ability of candidates to 'analyse and evaluate several ideas and details from the text and develop lines of thought' (Band 1). At Band 2, candidates 'respond in detail to ideas from the text, explaining them and expressing views on them with varying degrees of effectiveness'.

It is evident that candidates who responded to ideas and opinions were fulfilling the requirements of the syllabus. By responding through analysis and evaluation, they might well score full marks. However, many candidates did little more than select information from the text and repeat it with minimal comment. Such a candidate should be awarded up to a maximum of six marks out of ten. Some Centres awarded high marks to candidates simply because they referred to the content of the text, even when there was no analysis or evaluation. At least one Centre did not realise the quality of their candidates' evaluation and their marks were raised. Centres are asked to ensure that they carefully apply the Grade descriptors in the mark scheme.

However, when this Assignment was done well, it elicited some of the very best writing. Experience has shown that the best way of setting up this assignment is as follows:

- The teacher decides on a text (or texts) that is about one side of A4 in length altogether and which has been written to express controversial views and opinions. This choice of text enables candidates to agree or disagree with the opinions provided, analyse the content of the text and to transform what the original says into their own views.
- Candidates answer a task, which is in effect to write to the author of the text or to the publication where it has appeared.
- Candidates should not be taught by the teacher what to write, although they may discuss how to approach the task.
- Assignments should be marked for reading on the basis of how well candidates have understood and responded to the ideas and opinions expressed in the text (see above). Low marks must be given for mere repetition of the text or failure to engage with it.

Centres often allowed candidates to choose their own texts, but did not always monitor the choice closely. The result was that some texts were unsuitable and the candidate did not perform well.

Candidates should avoid texts that are:

- too long (it is more difficult to select ideas to discuss);
- too difficult (such as a scientific article about the basis of vegetarianism);
- too informative (because there are no ideas and opinions to engage with);
- too numerous (sometimes two short contrasting texts work well, but more than two inevitably confuse the candidate unduly).

In addition, news items should not be used, although comment columns in newspapers on newsworthy topics are suitable. Advertisements must have enough text to offer sufficient reading material. Some material from websites is unsuitable if it consists of brief two line 'paragraphs' with no development or discussion. Literature texts must be responded to for their ideas and opinions and not for their language and other literary devices because Moderators are not assessing a candidate's understanding of Literature. In

general, Centres are reminded to avoid informative writing and to use texts that express controversial views of view that candidates are likely to disagree with.

When responding, some candidates used the text as a stimulus for their own ideas and did not demonstrate understanding of the content while some other candidates mounted an 'attack' on the writer of their chosen text and did not respond to ideas and opinions.

Some good controversial articles were critical about the use of mobile phones and Facebook. Others that provided successful stimulus were about the use of CCTV in schools, genetic engineering, models being thin, school girls taking up boxing and a humorous piece suggesting that darts should be an Olympic sport.

This assignment has proved very successful when tackled in the right way. It produced some of the best writing in the folders. Centres are again reminded to ensure that they prepare adequately before undertaking this work.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05

Speaking and Listening

General comments

The test of speaking and listening skills appears to be well-established now at a number of Centres who present candidates for this optional component.

Comments on specific aspects of the Test

Part 1 - The Individual Task

Moderators continue to report that the most common format remains the fact-based informative 'talk' or presentation. Although the syllabus does allow a variety of approaches – monologues, dramatic performances and role playing media/news/documentary reports, for example – these are still uncommon.

Centres and candidates are free to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations – Examiners are not discouraging this. However, Moderators would like to see such presentations utilising a greater range of presentational and language devices.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very personal piece or a common, perhaps pedestrian topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. By contrast, a candidate who sets out, for example, to explore, to challenge, to be creative is likely to attract the attention of the listener and productive discussion will usually result.

Part 2 - Discussions

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

Choice of topics

Moderators report a similar range of topics as in previous sessions – largely of the informative type.

Good topics are those which contain a judicious mix of research and personal involvement, and those which are well-defined and focused. For example, 'sport' as a topic is probably too broad, whereas 'the pros and cons of contact sports' is likely to result in more focused and pertinent discussion.

Assessment

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 in a Band 1. In other words, a rather straightforward, pedestrian informative talk, which is 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, Examiners 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. This involves the integration of speaking and listening skills.

Moderators noted continued leniency in awarding higher marks for Part 1. In Part 2, however, responses were generally more accurate.

Moderators would again like to emphasise the possibility of differentiating tasks according to candidates' interests and abilities. For example, it is permissible for a weaker candidate to select a more straightforward topic and to aim for a safe, competent presentation, perhaps accepting a Band 3. It is advisable, on the other hand, for a stronger candidate to select a topic which is more complex and is likely to result in a deeper level of discussion. More challenging topics will also require more sophisticated presentational skills and a wider deployment of language devices – needed if Band 1 is to be attained.

Advice to Centres

- Moderators would again like to point out that a greater variety of approaches to Part 1 is encouraged.

Final comments

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

CIE is very grateful to have received even more samples on Compact Disc (CD). Moderators welcome this as it makes the task of external moderation quicker and more efficient. CIE encourages Centres to send in samples on CDs. 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.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/06

Speaking and Listening (Coursework)

General comments

Moderators report that the Centres who chose this option generally completed appropriate coursework tasks. Indeed, in some cases the tasks were interesting and resulted in stimulating speaking and listening activities which the candidates clearly enjoyed. Candidates and teachers worked together to design and implement a wide range of tasks which illustrated the candidates' speaking and listening skills fully.

Comments on specific aspects

Centres are reminded that three specific tasks are required: an individual presentation, a paired activity and group work. A wide variety of content is encouraged – from creative 'authentic' role playing of real life situations, to activities which are drawn from literary texts. 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 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 full and explanatory notes relating to the work undertaken.

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

Advice to Centres

A Moderator is seeking to fulfil two main duties while listening again to a Centre's coursework: initially to confirm the Centre's interpretation and application of the assessment criteria, but also to confirm that a variety of appropriate activities have been conducted.

Please remember to send in the Candidate Record Cards – these are the only means by which the Moderator is made aware of the tasks/activities which have been undertaken at the Centre.

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

CIE encourages sample work to be sent in using 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.