

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/11
Reading Passage (Core)

General comments

This paper proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and overall the standard of performance was good. The reading material was of interest to all and mainly well understood; the writing task offered scope for thoughtful responses and most candidates responded well to the task. All candidates approached the paper conscientiously and there was very little evidence of time pressure being a problem as most made at least an adequate attempt at all tasks. Presentation was, in general, usually good and at least, satisfactory. Candidates had obviously taken note of the concerns expressed about illegibility in previous reports and had taken steps to remedy the situation. The main area where candidates can improve their performance is their technique in responding to the two 6 mark questions which test understanding of vocabulary and use of language – the evidence suggests that, in general, candidates have an at least satisfactory understanding of what the questions are testing. To receive high marks, candidates need to demonstrate an understanding by providing a full explanation of the material. It is important that meaning is clearly conveyed for marks to be awarded.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most responses answered this question correctly by noting that the writer agreed to go to the prize-giving because he was attracted by the offer of fizzy drinks or because there was going to be a party. Very few provided the equally correct response that he went because he wanted to look at the School.
- (b) This question was answered well by many candidates. There were two main points required for the award of both marks: the first was that both boys and girls arrived at the party dressed in their best clothes and looking smart; the second was that although the girls remained looking presentable, the boys quickly became scruffy or untidy in appearance. Candidates who scored one mark tended not to mention the first of these points. It is important to note that questions carrying 2 marks usually require two specific points to be made in a correct answer and that the rubric to use own words is followed.
- (c) (i) The answer to this question was that the children may have been surprised to see the writer among the teachers because he was someone they had not seen before. Many candidates answered this correctly; others may have thought that this reason was too obvious and tried to manufacture something which was more far-fetched. As a general rule, 1 mark questions require straightforward points to be made as answers to them.
- (ii) Most candidates scored at least one of the two marks available. The reason why the children were not troubled by the writer's presence was two-fold: firstly, they were completely taken up with the events of the morning and secondly, their minds were on the forthcoming end of term celebrations.
- (d) Nearly all candidates answered this question correctly, stating that the School song was performed in both Setswana and English; there was no requirement here for the use of own words.
- (e) Many candidates pointed out correctly that the piano player spoilt the effect by singing so loudly as to drown out the rest of the singers. Some candidates appeared to consider this a virtue and consequently did not gain the mark available.

- (f) Most candidates scored at least one mark out of the two marks available in response to the question. Those gaining two marks clearly distinguished two specific points about the writer's response to the singing of the National Anthem. There were four points that could have been made: the writer was moved by the seriousness with which it was sung; he was involved in the experience; he found himself standing to attention; he found it a serious/moving occasion (despite the piano player's singing).
- (g) Most candidates correctly identified that the writer's surprise was due to the fact that the School football team had travelled such a great distance to play a match.
- (h) All three phrases had two details which required evidence of understanding for both available marks and it was, therefore, necessary for candidates to express both details in their own words, rather than repeating the words originally used by the writer. Thus, 'a wide range of ethnic groups' required explanation of both 'a wide range' and of 'ethnic'; 'impressively numerous' required the explanation that there were very many of them, and also that 'impressively' conveyed the sense of something very striking. 'Isolated location' needed an explanation of 'location' as well as of 'isolated'. As mentioned earlier, this was a question where candidates could have produced more detailed responses.
- (i) Most candidates had success in identifying three appropriate words or phrases to suggest people's attitudes towards the writer. Others did not explain *how* the language used by the writer conveyed this sense. As this question tests a response to the use of language, candidates are expected to explain the effects of the language used. Consequently, an explanation of the phrase 'blackmailing round of applause' should contain an explanation of the metaphor, such as 'this suggests that the children were trying to make the writer feel guilty if he did not join the School'. To achieve high marks it is important that responses do not simply paraphrase the words chosen.
- (j) For this summary question, ten possible points could have been made as listed below. Candidates were required to focus sufficiently closely on the question's requirements, to write about the writer's thoughts and feelings. Weaker responses were typified by general comments about the writer's behaviour at that particular time.

The writer was:

- 1 thinking about his decision
- 2 touched by the offer of sweets and drinks
- 3 impressed by the smartness of the children
- 4 surprised that they were not troubled by his presence
- 5 surprised by the range of ethnic groups
- 6 impressed by the singing (of the national anthem)/surprised by its tunefulness
- 7 moved by the solemnity the national anthem produced/by the candidates' concentration
- 8 impressed by the efforts of the staff/range of activities
- 9 surprised by how far the teams travelled
- 10 feeling that he was being blackmailed into staying/positively accepted.

Question 2

This question required candidates to adopt the persona of Will Randall, the writer of the stimulus passage, and to write a letter to a friend, containing the following three elements: his impressions of the children and their parents; his reasons for wanting to work at the School; any concerns he might have about the coming term.

Most wrote in an appropriate tone and the overall linguistic standard was good. The most frequent slips were the result of spelling confusions or problems with separating sentences correctly by using full stops. In only a few scripts were errors so frequent and serious that they impeded the reader's understanding.

To achieve high content marks, it was necessary to draw on and then develop information given in the original passage. Most candidates showed a clear appreciation of the writer's impressions of the children and of his reasons for wanting to work in the School.

Candidates who expressed the writer's concerns about coming to terms with the need to speak Setswana or, in particular, about the move to new School buildings, gave good evidence of having a clear appreciation of

the issues implied in the original passage. Less successful responses needed to develop only a few points about the writer's concerns about the coming term. As this is a directed writing task, it is expected that the reasons for the writer's concerns should have some direct reference to the content of the passage and so, although it was perfectly acceptable to write in a general letter to express the writer's concerns about how the children might behave and how much work he would have to do to prepare his lessons, these points could apply in general, rather than to this specific situation. The points made and are, therefore, not fully convincing evidence that the implications of the passage had been fully understood.

In conclusion, candidates should be congratulated both for the quality of their answers and for the seriousness with which they approached this examination; the main feature of the scripts of those who were less successful was a limited focus on the precise requirements of the questions – a point which those preparing for this examination in future years should bear clearly in mind.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/12
Reading Passage (Core)

General comments

This paper proved to be accessible to nearly all candidates and overall the standard of performance was good. The reading material was of interest to all and well understood; the writing task offered scope for thoughtful responses and most candidates responded well to the task displaying a very good understanding of the differing opinions. All candidates approached the paper conscientiously and there was very little evidence of time pressure as most made at least an adequate attempt at all tasks. Presentation was, in general usually good, and at least satisfactory.

The two main areas where candidates can improve their performance are: **(i)** in responding to the two 6 mark questions which test understanding of vocabulary and use of language and **(ii)** where the use of 'own words' is required by the rubric. Evidence suggests that, in general, candidates have at least a satisfactory understanding of what the questions are testing. To achieve high marks in the two 6 mark questions, candidates need to demonstrate an understanding by providing a full explanation of the material. It is important that meaning is clearly conveyed for marks to be awarded. To demonstrate use of 'own words', candidates should try to use an alternative to the word or phrase in the passage in order to show understanding.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) Most candidates answered this question correctly by commenting that Sebastian's shop was a room in his house that had been modified.
- (b) Most candidates correctly identified one of the characteristics of Sebastian's way of speaking as being that he spoke loudly. The second mark required identifying that his voice was harsh/rough/grating/damaged – here, candidates needed to find suitable synonyms for words (especially for 'hoarse') used in the passage. Repeating the phrase about Sebastian speaking as if he was talking to someone in the next field merely characterised the volume with which he speaks.
- (c) Those who understood that the task was asking for details about such things as Sebastian being a shopkeeper; owning a vineyard; owning land, tended to get two marks for this question. Those candidates who gained one mark on this question did so because they seem to have misunderstood the meaning of 'way of life'; many taking this to mean they had to write about either Sebastian's character or his appearance.
- (d) In general candidates answered this question well and identified Sebastian's two essentially different aspects: his anger and his dejection ('upset' was sufficient for this second point). Some candidates answered the question by explaining the reasons for his change of mood which could not be awarded.
- (e) The majority of candidates whose answers were awarded tended to get one mark out of the two marks available. Most candidates understood what was being asked here, but needed to answer with sufficient clarity to gain two marks. This required: **(i)** recognising Sebastian's feeling of being let down and **(ii)** that this was a result of the writer (and her husband) failing to turn up at the time Sebastian expected.

- (f) The majority of candidates gained at least one mark out of the possible two marks for... and understood how the misunderstanding arose. In the interpretation of the idea of the... operating in 'different time zones', some candidates took this literally to mean international zones being different between England and Spain and this was not awarded as it was a misunderstanding of the writer's point.
- (g) This was the first of the six mark questions mentioned in the general comments above. There were two marks available for each explanation of a chosen phrase. In the main, candidates tended to achieve one mark per explanation and this was mostly because they needed to be more precise in the expression and/or in the success of attempting to put the idea into their own words. Individually the points were:
- (i) 'miniature fortress' – it was necessary to communicate the idea of something fortified or castle-like that was very small ('small' was not sufficient in itself to convey the sense of miniature).
 - (ii) 'adopting his style' – this required the candidate to identify the sense of copying and of a way of speaking or arguing. Some candidates were more focused here on writing about how Sebastian repeated himself and this could, potentially, prevent candidates from gaining one or both points.
 - (iii) 'breathed reverently' – this was the most challenging phrase for candidates. Many got the sense of awe or respect but few interpreted the word 'breathing' as conveying the way in which the writer spoke.
- (h) As mentioned in the general comments above, this was a question where candidates could have produced more detailed responses. There were nine different phrases identified in the mark scheme (which also allowed the Examiner to award a phrase of the candidate's choosing providing it was accompanied by a sufficiently effective explanation). A large number of candidates were awarded three marks for this task and those marks were awarded for their identifying the correct phrases. The accompanying explanations generally explained what the chosen phrase meant, but did not provide the explanation, required by the rubric, of the effect of the phrase in conveying a sense of Sebastian's character and how the writer's choice of language brings him to life.
- (i) The summary question proved to be relatively straightforward with many candidates scoring five or more points. Where candidates lost marks on this question it was often because they had focused on only good or bad aspects of the house rather than the more general idea of key points of what the house was like. In the main, candidates made a reasonable attempt to follow the word limit. There were in fact 13 possible points; the house:
- 1 was a squat two-storey building/looked like a fortress/had turrets
 - 2 was over 150 years old
 - 3 had small windows
 - 4 had thick, old walls
 - 5 had several steps inside/was on different levels
 - 6 had old tiled roofs
 - 7 had a small cobbled patio
 - 8 had a large, rambling rose bush
 - 9 had a stable (with two mangers)
 - 10 had rotting floorboards
 - 11 had a hay loft
 - 12 did not have electricity
 - 13 did not have water/bathroom

Question 2

This question required candidates to imagine a conversation between the writer and her husband in which they express their differing opinions about the suitability of the house they have looked at. In terms of the content, the key to this task was in identifying the different opinions and the reasons they have for these opinions. This required the candidate to draw material from the passage, but also to go beyond the passage by developing ideas in a manner consistent with the two characters.

The response was to be presented as a script of the conversation and candidates dealt effectively with the format. Most answered this task well, adopting an appropriate tone and giving a strong and lively account of the two characters and of their relationship. The overall linguistic standard was good, with most responses falling into the higher mark range. In only a few scripts were errors so frequent and serious that they impeded the reader's understanding; the most frequent slips were the result of spelling confusions and difficulties with separating sentences correctly by using full stops. As a result, very few candidates were awarded marks from below Band 3 for writing. The main limitation in the content of some responses were in keeping a focus on the passage; some candidates becoming overly involved in the disagreement between husband and wife at the expense of detail from the passage. Some candidates gave greater force and detail to the husband's negative views at the expense of the writer's sense of the potential and the scope for home improvement which also prevented higher marks for content.

Overall, candidates should be congratulated both for the quality of their answers and for the seriousness with which they approached this examination. The main feature of the scripts of those who were less successful was a limited focus on the precise requirements of the questions – a point which those preparing for this examination in future years should bear clearly in mind.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/13

Reading Passage (Core)

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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/21

Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

This paper was often answered well and there were some excellent responses to the first question. The second question was also sometimes answered well. Weaker responses needed to demonstrate a wider understanding of vocabulary. Candidates have to understand the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning and in presenting pictures in the reader's mind. The answers to the summary ranged from concise and precise answers to those that missed obvious points and which did not present the relevant points in the candidate's own words. Candidates who scored high marks in their answers to this question demonstrated that they had carefully read Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

To achieve the high mark bands, candidates should prepare for the examination by building up a wide vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages. Candidates appeared to find both passages equally accessible. Responses were sometimes less strong because of the misunderstanding of an individual word in Passage A, such as 'intermittent' (misinterpreted as being synonymous with 'continuous') or 'organist' (thought by some to be a person who organises rather than a person who plays an organ).

Candidates were able to finish their answers in the time given. Those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question appeared to be at an advantage.

Candidates answered their questions in appropriate English. There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style. Most candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in legible handwriting. Some candidates' writing was very small or written in ways that made their work difficult to read.

It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences from the passage as they are not demonstrating an understanding of the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy material, but more difficult to select and adapt it to the question and to the genre in which they are writing.

Question 1: A Strange Wedding. Imagine that shortly after the marriage service, Mrs Ferris-Grebe and Mrs Kougar have their first conversation together. Write the conversation that would take place. In the conversation you should explore their views on the wedding ceremony, their feelings about the suitability of the marriage and the differences between the two women and their families.

[20 marks]

Many candidates wrote excellent conversations. It was clear that they understood the need to give both mothers some degree of personality and to convey that they had different views about the occasion and the marriage. Mrs Ferris-Grebe's formality and reverence for tradition and Mrs Kougar's liveliness and tolerance were evident in good answers. The dominant role or the taking of offence could be given to either woman, and some responses allowed Mrs Ferris-Grebe to have the last word whereas others allowed Mrs Kougar to win the battle of words or to walk off. More sophisticated responses allowed the balance of power and the tone to change during the course of the conversation.

Where the part played by both characters was equally significant. The issues were debated and the candidates presented both sides of the argument. Less good answers needed to create this balance. In weaker answers one of the women only asked questions, sometimes limited to those suggested by the question. The one-sidedness of the conversation meant that fewer marks were scored for reading and also for writing. The writing mark of five reflected the ability of the candidate to write a life-like conversation, and to make the feelings and attitudes of the two speakers quite clear. Nearly all candidates were able to at least hint at characterisation.

Most of the marks were given for showing understanding of the passage and for using ideas in the framework of the conversation. It was not possible to use all the details from the passage in the answers available, but good responses managed to include all the main ones, to do with appearance and behaviour as well as other details about the young couple's education and their family backgrounds. In good answers references to what went wrong in the church were used to reveal the expectations and viewpoints of both the women.

In less good answers there were examples of copying whole phrases and sentences from the passage and sometimes several lines were lifted with virtually no changes in the wording. The more the content of the passage was adapted to the genre and theme of the question, the more likely it was that the mark for reading would be high. Answers needed to include references to the events which occurred during the ceremony or to provide the points in developed linked ideas, rather than as a list. Some responses drifted away from the passage into speculation about the honeymoon or even into a general discussion of love and marriage. Alternatively, weaker responses selected a couple of points from the passage, such as the behaviour of the children or taste in clothing and focused on these at length. Sometimes criticisms of the event were attributed to an unlikely speaker, such as Mrs Ferris-Grebe expressing concerns about the organ-playing of her friend or the tediousness of the vicar. It did not sound convincing when Mrs Kougar apologised for the behaviour of her twins or the unreliability of the best man, her son. Not all candidates understood the difference and implications of the wedding dress being 'yellowing' rather than 'yellow'.

Good responses used the contrast between psychology and engineering degrees, and whether Cecilia would want to work as a market trader, as the basis for there being doubts about the compatibility of the couple, making it clear that the writer was using these ideas as examples of the more general differences between the two families and their aspirations. Effective answers to the third part of the question often managed to include references to other members of the families, particularly the outfits and demeanours of the two husbands.

There were several hints in the passage which were worth taking up. The first was that the two women had not previously met, and the reasons for this. Another was that Fred was part of a large family 'of many sons', whereas Cecilia, an 'elder daughter', had only one sister. A further possibility was that Cecilia did not get on with her mother or share her views, since she had been persuaded 'against her will' to wear the traditional family wedding dress. Another avenue which could have been explored was that Mrs Ferris-Grebe was in a state of nervous breakdown by the time of the meeting, given her 'private rainstorm' at the end of the ceremony. Good responses inferred from and developed some of these ideas.

Good answers were those which immediately established the very different characters of the two women and understood how they would speak and react at this first meeting between them, with the evidence of the ceremony to draw upon. These responses consistently used an appropriate voice, developed ideas but kept them based on the passage, and linked speeches in a logical and convincing way. Points for the three bullets were often effectively interwoven in the best responses. In the case of the third one, this was not necessarily spelt out but implied by the content of the women's speeches. Subtlety, humour and sarcasm were present and rewarded in these responses, as this showed a command of voice and expression and an understanding of the implications of their new relationship. Perceptive responses used the names of George and Mavis for effect, as well as Mrs Ferris-Grebe's favourite phrase of 'most unsuitable'. The more impressive responses were able to stage the conversation to show progression and deterioration, so that although the speakers were able to be civil to each other at the beginning, they were distinctly frosty by the end.

In weaker responses generally, meaning was clear and weakness of expression did not interfere with the flow of the dialogue, although it did sometimes mean that the voices were less convincing. These responses needed to say something about all of the three areas required by the question, rather than only two of the prompts. Often, it was a response to the first bullet which was not included and this was the easiest in that less inference was required. Another feature of weaker responses was a preamble in which the speakers made no specific references to the occasion, or an unconvincing ending to the conversation, which took the form of stopping abruptly with nothing resolved and no reference to parting, or of a sudden reversal and an offering of friendship which was not consistent with what had gone before. Those responses which became an abusive quarrel did not contain subtleties of either voice or give reasons for criticism, and there was a tendency in such responses for the two women to sound very much alike.

Finally, here are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Answer **all parts** of the question;
- Answer in your own words and **adapt** material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing;
- Be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and **use plenty of detail to support** your ideas;
- If you are writing as a character from the passage, try to create a **personality** and a **voice** which shows your understanding of what you have read;

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the church in paragraph 4 and (b) Mr Kougar in paragraph 6. Select words and phrases from these descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Generally the second half of the question was answered better than the first, and nearly all responses said something about the image created by 'a rainbow of a man' and how this reflected Mr Kougar's character and his behaviour at the wedding. In the answer to the church in paragraph 4, good responses pointed out some examples of imagery and realised that the church could not literally be 'a barn'. Some also explained how 'gloomy' and 'eerie' gave the impression of not only darkness but something more forbidding and inappropriate to the occasion. There were few marks in the top band as there needed to be a greater focus at word level. The more able responses needed to ensure they selected appropriate choices: those which referred to Mr Kougar rather than the Kougar family in general, as specified in the question.

The first level of approach was to identify words that had an extra layer of meaning, and the second level was to be able to explain why the writer used them. An example was the phrase 'ill-fitting jigsaw'. Good answers picked out the word 'jigsaw' and suggested what the layers of meaning might be. They gave the primary meaning that the church roof had cracks in it, but then went further to suggest lack of maintenance, and linked this idea to the broader effect of the church being a 'most unsuitable' choice of venue for the wedding, and one which put a dampener on the spirits of those in attendance and reflected badly on the person who chose the place, Mrs Ferris-Grebe. For candidates who did not understand the meaning of 'clamminess', 'eerie', 'jigsaw' or 'intermittent', this limited the number of valid observations which they could make in the first part of the question. There was some misunderstanding about why somewhere should be described as 'a barn', with many responses concentrating on dirtiness rather than on the size, darkness and emptiness of the church.

Good answers took opportunities to explore words and phrases while less good answers provided literal meanings. For example, good responses looked at the word 'rainbow' and linked it with not only the idea of the range and brightness of the colours of Mr Kougar's clothing but extended it to his cheerful personality and thence to the idea of his being eye-catching and entertaining, and even further to the idea of his being an antidote to the rainy day. They also identified the word 'beaming' to suggest not only the pleasure and pride shown in his facial expression but also the picture of a smiling yellow sun icon, and therefore a link with the brightness and warmth of his appearance and character as an additional weather image.

Weaker responses repeated general effects, such as that 'Mr Kougar was a happy and proud man', and needed to focus on specific use of language. Conversely, others immediately gave a creative overview, suggesting that the 'ill-fitting jigsaw' represented the incompatibility of the couple or that the name 'Kougar' was meant to suggest the animal-like nature of the family. While these ideas were not discounted, the response also needed to make supported points to show understanding of meaning and effect at word level and in the immediate context of the paragraph. While it is true that Mr Kougar's general role was to present a contrast to the grey Ferris-Grebes and their choice of church, it was first necessary to establish the implications of his bright clothing and his beaming smile in relation to his own personality.

Responses which included long quotations and the grouping or listing of words and phrases needed to ensure that words within phrases were sufficiently distinguished. For instance, 'gloomy' and 'eerie' are not synonymous and should have been explored separately. Furthermore, a peacock is indeed associated with pride, but the showy bird reference also conjures up an image of brightly coloured feathers used to attract the eye and elicit admiration, and this effect should also have been mentioned.

The recommended approach to this question is that single words and short phrases should be selected and then explained in terms of their precise meaning and effect. A reasonable number of choices should be selected in order for the response to be sufficiently substantial to answer the question. The following includes 13 selected quotations, and these would be more than sufficient for the award of the top mark provided that the quality of the explanation was high and consistent enough. These examples are given to show that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

(a) The church in paragraph 4

The writer makes clear that the church was an inappropriate and depressing place for a wedding by referring to it as a 'barn' and thereby conveying that it was huge, uncomfortable and featureless, like a place more suited to farm animals. That it is also both 'gloomy' and 'eerie'. This conveys to the reader that it is dimly lit and, as a result, rather mysterious and intimidating. The idea of there being 'livestock' lurking in the dark corners continues the barn image and suggests that there are mice, spiders or other unpleasant creatures about to leap out on the congregation. The impression that the church is poorly maintained is sustained by the image of its roof being an 'ill-fitting jigsaw', meaning cracked with gaps wide enough to let the rain through, like a badly made picture puzzle. The 'intermittent dripping' of rain through the cracks creates an unpleasant aural sensation, which, being at irregular intervals, would have distracted from the ceremony and created tension. The word 'clamminess', meaning sticky dampness, adds to the overall wet and miserable atmosphere both outside and inside the church, and evokes sympathy for the Kougars, who are not at all at home in this kind of environment.

(b) Mr Kougar in paragraph 6

George Kougar is presented as being inappropriately dressed and without any dress sense, but also as not caring at all about these facts. He brings a welcome colour to the proceedings and contrasts strikingly with both the drab church and the greyness of the Ferris-Grebes. The descriptive language is exaggerated to create the effect of him being a larger than life character. The 'rainbow' image conveys not only the number of colours he is wearing but their bright hues, specified by his 'bright purple' trousers. These radiant images tie in with his 'beaming smile' and how he 'seemed to shine', suggesting he is a source of sunshine amid the rain. His 'loud, garishly striped shirt' seems to shout out and demand attention because of its clashing colours. His lack of subtlety is also made clear by his comparison to a 'peacock' that 'strutted', which conveys that he is both proud and colourful, and that he is enjoying the attention as well as the occasion, as if he is a painted clown in baggy trousers performing in a circus.

Here again are some ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- **Avoid general comments** such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase'. Such comments will not earn any marks at all.
- If you are worried about this question, your first task is to **choose some words and phrases** that seem special to you. Do not write out whole sentences but use single words or phrases of two or three words. Treat each of your choices separately and do not present them as a list.
- If you are not sure about explaining effects, **try to give a meaning** for each of your choices. That can give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to spot **images** and explain them. Say what they literally mean and explain why they have been applied to the text. There are several examples in the comments on this question and the answer given above.

Question 3: Summarise (a) the traditions that Chinese families often follow, as described in Passage B (A Strange Wedding) and (b) the things that went wrong at the wedding ceremony described in Passage A (Chinese Wedding Traditions).

[Total: 20]

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 24 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous choice. This was the highest-scoring question for many of the candidates. Most candidates were aware of the appropriate form, style and tone for a summary.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A. In many cases, candidates had already answered two questions. There was evidence that some candidates copied out notes, although sometimes these contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could be scored twice. For example, Passage A mentions the heavy rain more than once, but there was only one point for this item. Good summaries avoided repetition.

While it was perfectly in order to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses changed the sequence so that related points could be grouped together. For example, in Passage B the date of the wedding, the time of the ceremony and the colour red were all examples of choices made according to superstition.

Candidates generally found it easy to identify summary points in Passage B. This meant that sometimes the response was list-like. Points 10, 11, 12 and 13 were rarely offered, suggesting that candidates dealt with the passage in order. Here, candidates would have benefitted from planning their answer logically and comprehensively, and stopping writing when they thought they had covered all the main points.

Candidates should avoid long explanations. For example, in Passage B the introduction about family alliances was not required by the question. There was also a long section about the sending of letters. The least good answers were those that simply copied parts of this explanation out or provided close paraphrases. What was required was simply a brief reference to the fact that three letters were sent by the groom's family. Likewise, the different dresses worn by the bride did not need to be described; it sufficed to say that there were three dresses. Unnecessary explanations tend to make the summary as a whole longer than the required length. Candidates need to be advised about the reduction of writing marks for excessive length, and that if the response is 'grossly long' (i.e. more than a page and a half of average handwriting), they are likely to score 0 marks for writing.

It is important that answers do not copy at great length from the original passages. From Passage A, where the information about the church was copied at length, no understanding was demonstrated. From Passage B, copied phrases that stood out in particular were 'infused with pomelo in order to cleanse her from bad influences' and 'they also make sure that the moon and stars are properly aligned'. These are clear examples of wording that needed to be changed. On the other hand, 'jewellery and money' was not considered a singular enough phrase to warrant change, and those candidates who did change it to 'gifts' needed to ensure the point was precise enough.

Better responses avoided including introductory statements and making comments rather than giving an informative summary. They also followed the instruction to write about one side in total. As will be seen from the example given below, it was possible to write this summary quite briefly. Some candidates with very small handwriting wrote at too great a length, even though their answers fitted onto a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be an average of eight or nine words to a line; small handwriting can fit as many as fifteen words to a line.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Some responses needed to maintain focus on their answers – they needed to focus on the question and maintain the summary style rather than starting to comment on the facts. Candidates are reminded that this is an exercise in informative writing, which should be clear and to the point. Better responses were specific about what exactly went wrong in Passage A, making it clear that the vicar's speech was too long and not just that the vicar was disturbed by the poor behaviour of the congregation. Likewise, the best man did not forget to bring the rings or lose the rings, but was only temporarily unable to find them.

Higher marks for writing are awarded where the candidate forms varied and fluent sentence structures, and gives just enough information about the points to convey each one clearly, so that the Examiner does not need to give the point only as a 'benefit of doubt' or decide not to give it because it is a 'point not made'. Extraneous points not directly related to the question were sometimes made in **section (b)**, for example that the bride was wearing an old dress, or that the families had not previously met.

Some candidates provided a comparative response, comparing the features and sometimes judging the relative merits of western and eastern style marriage ceremonies, or commenting on the things that might go wrong in them. This allowed them to earn only some of the available reading points as others were ignored as irrelevant to the comparison, such as the effect of the pouring rain or Mrs Ferris-Grebe's flood of tears in Passage A.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained as clearly as possible. They are also translated into the writer's own words, and the handwriting, would fit onto a side of paper with space to spare.

Passage B

Three letters are sent at various stages to the bride's family by the groom's family, which organises and pays for everything to do with the wedding. The chosen date for the wedding, the timing of it to begin on the half hour, and the use of the colour red all symbolise good luck. The bride prepares for the ceremony by isolating herself to symbolically mourn losing her family and by taking a ritual bath to purify herself. The groom prepares for the big day by sleeping on a new bed provided by his parents and by getting a nephew to jump on it to bring fertility to the couple. The bride wears three dressings during the wedding day, the second one being for the banquet, during which the couple serve tea to the relatives and guests and are given jewellery and money. The following day, the bride rises early to honour her ancestors and to be introduced to the groom's relatives and friends.

Passage A

The heavy rain leaked through the roof of the dark and damp church. The Kougar family was inappropriately dressed and the twins misbehaved by fighting and running around the church. The bride was late and the Wedding March was badly played by the organist. The vicar's sermon was much too long and he lost his place. The best man then forgot where he had put the ring. Mrs Ferris-Grebe thought that someone had made a rude remark about her and was in tears by the end of the ceremony.

Here are some ways in which summaries could be improved:

- Explain points very **briefly** sufficiently to show what the passage means.
- **Do not copy** whole phrases from the original.
- Write no more than **one side** of average handwriting.
- **Write informatively** and never comment on the content of the passage.
- Be careful to giving only information that is **focused on the question**.
- Only **make a point once**.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/22
Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

This paper was often answered well and there were some excellent responses to the first question. The second question was also answered well by many candidates. Weaker responses showed that their range of vocabulary was less wide and that they needed to understand the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning and in presenting pictures to the reader's mind. The answers to the summary ranged from concise and precise answers to those that needed to ensure obvious points were not missed and that relevant points were presented in the candidate's own words. Candidates who scored high marks in their answers to this question demonstrated a close reading of Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

In order to score high marks, candidates could prepare for the examination by building up a wide, appropriate vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages.

Candidates were able to finish their answers in the time given. Those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question appeared to be at an advantage.

Candidates answered their questions in appropriate English and there was no evidence that the language of texting influenced their style.

Many candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in clear handwriting. Some candidates' writing was small or written in a variety of ways that made their work difficult to read.

There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style.

It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences from the passages as they are not demonstrating an understanding of the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy but more difficult to select and adapt to the genre in which they are writing and to the question.

Question 1: A visit to Rataia. Imagine a meeting between the writer and the town mayor to discuss the writer's ideas for Rataia. Write the conversation that would take place. Include the views of both speakers on how the changes would affect the town, the lives of the inhabitants and the natural environment.

[20 marks]

Many candidates wrote excellent conversations. It was clear that they understood the need to give both the mayor and the writer some degree of personality and that they both had a role to play. The mayor had to represent the people of his town and to defend them against change. Good answers therefore argued for the environment as represented in the passage and for the people's love of a simple life. The writer needed to be enthusiastic and persuasive, promising a superior type of visitor, jobs, housing and electricity for Rataia. It is not surprising that some of the best answers allowed the mayor to play a listening role until near the end of the conversation, when he produced an extended argument in which he exposed the writer's plans as unacceptable. Sometimes, the balance of the argument would change. At the beginning it would seem that the writer was winning the argument only to have the tables turned on him at the end.

Where the part played by both characters was equal, the issues were debated and the candidates presented both sides of the argument. Less good answers needed to create this balance. In a significant number of answers the mayor only asked questions, sometimes restricted to those suggested by the question. The one-sidedness of the argument meant that fewer marks were scored for reading and also for writing. The writing mark of five reflected the ability of the candidate to write a lifelike if formal conversation and to make the attitudes of the two speakers quite clear.

Most of the marks were given for reading the passage and for using ideas within the framework of the argument. It was not possible to use all the detail from the passage in the space available, but most candidates were honest about the enormity of the development. Nearly all candidates mentioned the cost of electricity to the town and the flood of money that would ensue. The good answers were the ones that recognised the cultural change that was proposed, although comparatively few made anything of the smart people in their fine clothes strolling along the front. The best responses were often those which made something of small details such as the fish that swam right up to the waterfront and the man that took people out in his boat.

The least successful answers were those that needed to use and adapt detail from the passage and to make reference to the plans. There were examples of copying whole phrases and sentences from the passage and sometimes several lines were copied with virtually no changes in the wording. The most common example of this was the passage about the view from the hills above the town. Good answers not only used their own words when using this section, but also made it clear that the writer was using it as an example of his environmental credentials. The more one adapted the content of the passage to the genre and to the theme of the question, the more likely it was that the mark for reading would be high. The second example of copying was the list of changes that the writer intended to make, such as building hotels and a theme park. The best answers used a selection from this list and explained the advantages to the mayor.

The second part of the conversation, about the reactions of the people, was done well. The best answers explained their love of the simple life with some care, for example showing how they accepted being cut off from 'civilisation' and electricity. This was often necessary since the writer was depicted as someone who could not understand their attitude and bombarded the mayor with arguments about employment and housing, schools for their children and so on. Less good answers needed to be more expansive in this section.

The third point, about the environment, was more challenging. There were several hints in the passage, which were worth taking up. The most obvious one was the view, though comparatively few responses demonstrated an understanding that the building projects would ruin it. The second possibility was that of the trees. Many candidates mentioned that their first priority would be to restore the 'old' town, which included the trees and bushes in the square. A third possibility was that of the fishes. Their remarkable beauty and their sheer numbers would be an attraction to visitors, and too often they were consigned to an aquarium. Fourthly there was the man with the boat and the islands with their nature reserves, and fifthly there were the birds singing on the hills. It was rare that candidates took up more than a couple of these options and in less successful answers this part of the question needed to be addressed.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- answer **all parts** of the question
- answer in your own words and **adapt** material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing
- be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and **use plenty of detail to support** your ideas
- if you are writing as a character from the passage, try to create a **personality** and a **voice** which shows your understanding of what you have read.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the town in paragraph 2 and (b) what the writer experienced from the top of the hill in paragraph 3. Select words and phrases from these descriptions and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

In the answer to the question about paragraph 2, good answers pointed out some examples of personification and realised that the church could not physically hide, as if ashamed of itself. Some explained how overgrown bushes could be 'a riot', for example that they were uncontrollable and that one had as it were to fight to get past them. The first strategy was to identify words that had an extra layer of meaning, but the second strategy was to be able to explain why the writer used them. Another example was the phrase 'atmosphere of yesterday'. Good answers picked out the word 'yesterday' and suggested what the layers of meaning might be. They gave the meaning that the place did not move with the times, but also linked the ideas of 'yesterday' to not wanting to progress like the people who lived in Rataia. Thus, the town square became an image for the people.

Good answers took opportunities to explore words and phrases while less good answers provided literal meanings. For example, good responses looked at the word 'magical' in response to the question about

paragraph 3 and linked it with a fantasy world where the birdsong was what could be imagined, but what was actually heard. They also identified the word 'bursts' to suggest the suddenness with which the sound was broken.

A few candidates misunderstood the identification of paragraphs and did not count the first line as a paragraph. As a result they wrote about the view from the hills and the fish in the rock pool. Their answers were accepted. They could have related 'transfixed' to 'stunned' in the previous paragraph and shown how the purity of the water and the display of the fish moved the writer. 'Myriads' would have suggested uncountable numbers and 'dazzling' the brightness of the colours (with a comment that they would not be likely to dazzle him, but the exaggeration was effective). Better responses pointed out the contrasted movement in the use of 'darting', 'cruising' and 'lazing'.

The following answer does not attempt to explain the effects of all the possible words and phrases used by the writer. Seven quotations have been selected, and these would be sufficient for the award of the top mark provided that the quality of the explanation was high enough. These examples are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

(a) *The town in paragraph 2*

In this paragraph the writer makes his feelings clear by using words and phrases that make it sound as if inanimate objects are human. For example he says 'an apology for a hotel', yet a hotel cannot apologise. It is a neat way of saying that the hotel is so bad that it ought to say sorry, perhaps just for being there. The reader is reminded of a person who is always saying 'sorry'. The writer does this again when he describes the trees as 'sad, droopy'. People can be sad but not trees, so the reader must imagine a sad person with head bowed, unable to look up (a strong image). The trees would therefore look as if they had no water and they could not hold their branches up proudly. So what does the reader make of a shop that 'boasted the imposing title, 'Emporium'?' In the context of the paragraph, one cannot expect the shop to be imposing, so the word 'boasted' must be sarcastic. It is as if the shop is saying 'Just look at me' when there is nothing much to look at. Hence the reader might be slightly amused.

(b) *What the writer experienced from the top of the hill in paragraph 3*

The view that the writer describes is the very opposite from that of the town centre. This is made clear by the use of the words 'magnificent' and 'stunned'. 'Magnificent' suggests something far beyond the ordinary, like a great building (for example, the Taj Mahal) or royalty dressed in flowing robes. It is one of those words that the reader must not underestimate. 'Stunned' is an image. The writer is not left breathless by some physical assault, but the effect of the view on his mind is clearly similar. The word exaggerates, but again the reader must not underestimate. The image describing the light shining off the sea as a 'sheet of glass' might suggest calmness and flatness of the surface, but the context suggests that when the sun shines on the sea the reflection is powerful enough perhaps to dazzle the beholder. The 'mountains fused into a purple haze' is a much more gentle image, where the line of mountains stretches so far into the distance that one loses the line and sees a beautiful mist-like effect in purple, which of course contrasts with the gold of the sand. It reminds one of a painting.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- **Provide specific comments.** General comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase' will not earn any marks.
- Your first task is to **choose some words and phrases** that seem special to you. Use single words or phrases of two or three words rather than writing out whole sentences. Treat each of your choices separately rather than presenting them as a list.
- If you are not confident about explaining effects, **try to give a meaning** for each of your choices. That may give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to spot **images** and explain them. Say what they literally mean and explain why they have been applied to the passage. There are several examples in the comments on this question and the answer given above.

Question 3: Summarise (a) the discomforts and dangers caused by the inhospitable place in Passage B (A Winter Journey) and (b) the disappointing aspects of the town noticed by the travellers in Passage A (A Visit to Rataia).

[Total 5 marks]

To answer this question successfully, candidates needed to identify fifteen points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 22 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous selection.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A, from which candidates had already been working. There was evidence that many candidates made notes, although sometimes the notes contained items that were so similar to each other that the points could not score twice. For example, Passage B mentioned the wind and the red dust on more than one occasion, but there was only one mark for each of these items. Good summaries avoided repetition.

While it was perfectly acceptable to give the points in the order in which they appeared in the passage, good responses sometimes changed the order so that similar points were grouped together. For example, from Passage A, they mentioned the hotel, the church and the café as examples of buildings that clearly were not fulfilling their potential.

Candidates needed to avoid long explanations. For example, in Passage B there was a long section about the water, how difficult it was to obtain and how unpleasant it was to drink in any form. The least good answers were those that simply copied parts of this explanation out. Close paraphrases were also weak. What was required was a brief reference to the problem of getting water and the fact that when they drank it, it caused stomach disorders.

It is important that candidates do not copy a significant amount from the original passages. From Passage A, the information about the red dust was copied at length, including the sentence 'Dust rather than air becomes the medium through which we live'. Apart from the fact that this demonstrated no evidence of understanding, it added to the length of the summary. From Passage A, there was much copying of paragraph 2. A phrase that stood out as clearly as 'sad, droopy trees' was a good example of wording that needed to be changed. On the other hand, 'stomach problems' was not considered singular enough to warrant change, although many candidates changed 'problems' to 'upsets'.

Most responses did not waste unnecessary time writing introductory statements and there were fewer examples than previous sessions of comment rather than informative summary. Most candidates followed the instruction to write about one side in total. As will be seen from the example given below, it was simple to write this summary quite briefly. Some candidates with very small handwriting clearly wrote at too great a length even though their answers fitted into a page. Average handwriting is assumed to be an average of eight or nine words to a line whilst small handwriting can fit as many as fifteen words to a line.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition, and in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Those awarded marks in the lower bands tended to lose the focus of their answer – they needed to stay focussed on the question or not to comment on the facts. Candidates are reminded that this is an exercise in writing information, which should be provided clearly and to the point.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as clearly as possible. They are also translated into the writer's own words, and the answer if handwritten, will fit into a side of paper with space to spare.

Passage B

The discomforts caused to the travellers in Passage B were that the weather was very cold and the wind was very strong. The wind blew clouds of red dust that penetrated their clothes and their mouths. Walking was difficult because of the deep drift sand, and at the end of the day they were very tired. There were shortages of firewood and water which, when drunk, caused stomach pains. There was not enough food for the horses which suffered accordingly. The ground was too hard to knock the tent pegs in with ease and there was a really unpleasant smell. There was a danger of falling through the salt crust into the filthy slime below.

Passage A

The writer was disappointed by the poor state of the town as a whole. In particular this included a small number of shops, the poor-quality hotel and the miserable town square. There was only one café with few customers, and the church looked as if nobody cared for it. The town was geographically isolated from anywhere else and there was no electricity. Although the climate seemed excellent, tornados and thunderstorms struck frequently.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- explain points very **briefly**, sufficiently to show what the passage means
- **do not copy** whole phrases from the original
- write no more than **one side** of average handwriting
- **write informatively** and never comment on the content of the passage
- be careful to give only information that is **focused on the question**
- only **make a point once**.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/23
Reading Passages (Extended)

General comments

This paper was often answered well and there were some excellent responses to the first question. The second question was also sometimes answered well by many candidates. Weaker responses showed that their range of vocabulary was less wide and that they needed to understand the function of language in transmitting shades of meaning and in creating pictures in the reader's mind. The answers to the summary ranged from concise and precise answers to those that needed to ensure obvious points were presented in the candidate's own words. Candidates who scored high marks in their answers to this question demonstrated a close reading of Passage A as well as the new Passage B.

In order to score high marks, candidates could prepare for the examination by building up a wide, appropriate vocabulary, both to express themselves and to understand the words used in the reading passages.

Candidates were able to finish their answers in the time given. Those who allowed enough time to prepare their answers to the third question appeared to be at an advantage.

Candidates answered their questions in appropriate English and there was no evidence that the language of texting influenced their style.

Many candidates wrote in a dark coloured pen in clear handwriting. Some candidates' writing was small or written in a variety of ways that made their work difficult to read.

There were no marks given for accuracy in this paper, although some candidates' work was affected by unclear or limited style.

It is important that candidates do not copy whole phrases and sentences from the passages as they are not demonstrating an understanding of the wording of the original. They should remember that it is easy to locate and copy but more difficult to select and adapt to the genre in which they are writing and to the question.

Question 1: Imagine you are a reporter investigating the cause of an infestation of mice that has occurred throughout the village of Malsam. Write your report for a national newspaper, using the headline: 'Horror Plague Overwhelms Village.' You should include the effects of the infestation on the villagers, the attitudes of the villagers to the Duvall family and the comments of the Duvall parents and children.

[20 Marks]

Many candidates wrote good newspaper articles, adopting an appropriate journalistic style and including some convincing, lively and original interviews. The best responses were those where candidates had used the narrative account of the Duvall's experience to skilfully craft an engaging and informative report on the effects of the infestation on the whole village. Candidates had understood the need to adapt the personal experiences of one family into the shared experiences of a community and to present them in a dramatic and interesting way. Good responses contained a relevant selection of points from the passage that had been modified and adapted to convey the enormity of the problem; the speed of the infestation, the destruction caused by the mice, their endless chattering and their disgusting appearance. There was also some good development of these points, for example, the cost of poison and mousetraps, the shortages of food, lack of sleep and damage to the structure of houses. These effects were often included in interviews that successfully conveyed the scavenging nature of the mice and also the fear, disgust and exasperation of the villagers. There was also reference to the previous plague and ensuing loss of life that some inhabitants remembered, giving a further sense of anxiety and dread.

Less good responses were focused on the Duvall's problems and they needed to focus more on the village. Often the points from the passage needed to be adapted or re-ordered, as well as. These accounts, therefore, were presented as a narrative or a summary of the Duvall's experiences.

In weaker responses the effects on the villagers needed to be included so that there were original interviews from other inhabitants. Instead there were quotations from the Duvall family that were mainly copied from the passage. For example, 'a warm body squirmed' and 'shrill and angry.' Also, these responses needed to adapt from the specific to the general so that the report had a sense of the infestation being significant or newsworthy. This would then provide the drama of a 'horror plague' and a 'terrorised village'.

Some candidates needed to develop the significance of the family of mice at the end of the passage and seemed unaware that they were the cause of the village plague. This lack of understanding made it difficult to fully develop the second and third parts of the task. Some candidates believed that the plague, referred to in the title, was the one which killed many villagers years ago. They therefore found it difficult to address the first part of the task. There was little reference to activities of the mice and responses were focused on hospitalisation, quarantine and deaths. Although these reports were dramatic with a sense of urgency they required inclusion of details from the passage. Some responses also displayed a misunderstanding of the sequence of events and the cause of the plague, so the material was not always used effectively for the purposes of the task.

In the second section of the report many responses conveyed the attitudes of the villagers convincingly, making references to disgruntled and angry villagers. Good responses adapted details from different parts of the passage to craft realistic interviews expressing hostility and resentment towards the Duvall family. Some expressed their suspicions about the newcomers and commented on their secretiveness, the rumours about Henri buying poison and the children keeping pet mice. Many blamed the family for their lack of vigilance and for not being honest or seeking help earlier. Equally successful were quotations that supported or sympathised with the Duvall family, referring to their lack of experience in dealing with mice and their failure to understand the severity of the problem because they were not aware of the previous plague. Less good responses needed to fully address this section; some candidates included comments on the villagers' initial suspicion of the family but did not develop other details from the passage. Weaker responses should have included original interviews instead of quotations from the passage, for example, 'the blond-haired children and their gentle parents'.

There were some successful responses to the third section which often provided cohesion to the report by including comments from the Duvall family about their attempts to get rid of the mice, the reaction of the villagers and the actions of the children. Their tone was apologetic and defensive. This was conveyed through convincing interviews and comments about their fear of being ridiculed and not knowing who to ask for help. Some reports included realistic statements from the children and references to their pet mice. In others the reporter commented on the evasiveness of the children and believed that the family held a guilty secret. In less good responses this section needed to be linked to the rest of the report. Some of these candidates used quotations from the passage or paraphrased the entire sentence about the Duvall family being hounded from their home.

Good responses wrote engaging and dramatic introductions and concluded the report appropriately. There was effective use of language and a sense of investigative and eye-witness reporting. Weaker responses needed to sustain a journalistic style rather than lapsing into narrative. The events were understated and the endings needed to provide a satisfactory conclusion.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- answer **all parts** of the question
- answer in your own words and **adapt** material from the passage to the type of answer you are writing
- be aware of the main issues and themes in the passage and **use plenty of detail to support** your ideas
- if you are using newspaper interviews try to create **convincing** characters and **original** quotations.

Question 2: Re-read the descriptions of (a) the mice in the parents' bedroom in paragraph 5 and (b) the mother mouse and her brood in the last paragraph. Select words and phrases from the descriptions, and explain how the writer has created effects by using this language.

[10 marks]

Most candidates selected appropriate examples of language and offered some meanings. Good responses explored the connotations and implications of words and explained their intended effects clearly and precisely.

In analysing the choice of vocabulary in paragraph 5, good responses gave an overview of the menacing and disgusting nature of the mice and supported it with specific examples. The metaphor of the sea was not only identified but carefully explained by dealing with words and phrases individually rather than as a list of examples. Some candidates also discussed the image of the Duvall family clinging precariously on to their raft surrounded by the sea of mice. Good answers explained the effects of specific words such as 'squirmed' and 'writhed' and commented on the use of 'bald tail' to evoke feelings of revulsion. Many candidates discussed words that conveyed the frenetic activities of the mice and explained why their noises were so threatening, particularly in the darkened room. Some commented that their sudden disappearance was also menacing as it implied an organised and efficient troop. Less good responses needed to discuss the effects of specific words or explain their meanings in the context of the passage. Some responses contained general comments that needed to at least be supported by examples. Some candidates identified the use of metaphor but an explanation was required. Weaker responses needed to include shorter quotations and an explanation of specific words. Some explanations contained repetition of the original, for example 'as loud as men sawing through hard wood means that the noise was loud'. The use of 'men' and 'hard' was rarely commented upon.

In response to the language in the last paragraph, many candidates selected appropriate examples. Good responses focused on the humanisation of the mother mice and her babies and the writer's creation of a miniature family scene, similar to that in the children's story book, in order to appeal to the reader. Comments were made about the contrasting images of the ugly, noisy and scavenging animals in paragraph five and the harmless, vulnerable and serene mice in the last paragraph. Candidates are not expected to draw comparisons between the extracts but in this examination there was an opportunity to do so and some answers were enhanced by discussing the differences and supporting them with relevant quotations. Less good responses needed greater depth of analysis. Some candidates commented on the 'cute and adorable family' but needed to explain how the writer's language made them appear so appealing. Some candidates identified the use of alliteration but needed to discuss its effectiveness.

The following answer does not attempt to explain all of the possible words and phrases used by the writer. Seven or eight quotations would be sufficient for the award of a top mark provided that the quality of the explanations was high enough. These examples are given so that candidates can understand what constitutes an appropriate response to the question.

(a) *The mice in the parents' bedroom in paragraph 5*

The writer's intent was to create a noisy, animated and threatening atmosphere by using the words 'the room became alive with chattering, scuttling and squeaking.' The word 'scuttling' makes the mice sound as if they are moving quickly and secretively. 'Squeaking' is a high pitched sound, which is quite irritating and 'chattering' seems as if they are talking non-stop. The room seems busy and frantic implying there is a large number of creatures. 'Shrill and angry' suggests that the voices are deliberately becoming higher, more piercing and more threatening. The writer has used the metaphor 'sea of movement' to show the quantity and movement of the mice, suggesting that they cover a large area and are rising and falling like waves. The word 'swelled' supports this image of waves. 'Raft of safety' suggests that the couple are on a small flimsy structure and are helpless in the dangerous sea around them. The word 'drown' suggests they are being enveloped and overwhelmed, reinforcing the idea of danger. It is quite a frightening image. 'As loud as men sawing through hard wood' gives me an image of two lumberjacks wielding a huge saw and determinedly cutting through a large tree trunk. There is an impression of noise, danger and also strength. The writer wants us to feel disgusted by using the words 'squirmed' and 'writhing', making the mice seem like worms or maggots moving uncontrollably. 'Trail of a bald tail' sounds more disgusting than a fluffy, furry tail because the reader imagines a slithering snake or worm rather than a cuddly animal.

(b) *The mother mouse and her brood in the last paragraph*

The writer portrays a different image of the mice; he has humanised them in order to gain sympathy. They are not sinister or threatening but are a harmless little family. 'In a small box with sheep wool and an old sock' gives a feeling of cosiness and warmth and the idea that someone has collected these soft objects to make the family comfortable and to protect them because they are precious. The mother mouse is also protective of her babies, as a human mother would be. The word 'nuzzled' implies a gentle gesture, a show of affection. 'Warm tail wrapped around her brood' also shows this affection – she is hugging her babies with her tail and keeping them from harm. The tail is not dirty or gristly as in paragraph five; this is a different kind of mouse. The writer uses alliteration in 'pink and puckered' to describe the babies. The 'p' sounds are soft and we associate pink with softness and new babies. Puckered could imply wrinkling, giving a further impression of a new born baby, helpless and harmless.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- **Provide specific comments.** General comments such as 'the writer makes you feel that you are really there' or 'this is a very descriptive phrase' will not earn any marks.
- Your first task is to **choose some words and phrases** that seem special to you. Use single words or phrases of two or three words rather than writing out whole sentences. Treat each of your choices separately rather than presenting them as a list.
- If you are not confident about explaining effects, **try to give a meaning** for each of your choices. That may give you half marks for the question.
- When you explain effects, think of what the reader imagines when reading the word or phrase. It may suggest more than one thing.
- Learn to spot **images** and explain them. Say what they literally mean and explain why they have been applied to the passage. There are several examples in the comments on this question and the answer given above.

Question 3: Summarise (a) the positive aspects of rats as described in Passage B and (b) the negative aspects of mice as described in Passage A.

[20 marks]

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to identify 15 points that were relevant to the question and to present them succinctly in their own words. There were 25 possible answers in the mark scheme, which gave candidates a generous selection.

Good answers were the result of a methodical reading of both the new passage and Passage A, from which candidates had already been working. There was evidence that many candidates made notes of the salient points.

Good summaries included specific pieces of information and did not generalise. For example, they did not state that rats are used in scientific experiments without giving examples or that mice are disgusting without giving instances of this.

From Passage B, good responses did not contain an unnecessarily long introduction about peoples' negative perceptions of rats before focusing on their positive qualities. There was a focus on the task and points were explained with concision. There were few comments, no long explanations or phrases lifted from the passage. Less good responses contained quotations, for example 'astounded by [their] intelligence'. There was also some repetition, particularly where candidates copied the summarising phrase used near the end of the passage '[because of] their amazing memories, rapid learning ability, curiosity and friendliness'.

For Passage A, responses were less focussed than for Passage B. Some candidates wrote about mice with reference to the Duvall family and used quotations from the passage, for example, 'shrill and angry' and 'threw them away in disgust.' There was also some commentary and explanation about why people would not want mice in their homes and that people were tired and unable to work as they had been kept awake all night. Some candidates included positive views of mice which were not relevant to the question. Some responses were written in note form or as lists. In these cases candidates would be rewarded for including relevant points but would not achieve full marks for the quality of writing.

Those candidates who wrote summaries concisely and without long explanations or repetition in their own words, could score the whole five marks for aspects of writing. Those awarded marks in the lower bands tended to lose the focus of their answer – they needed to stay focussed on the question and comment on the facts. Candidates are reminded that this is an exercise in writing information, which should be provided clearly and to the point.

When reading the following specimen answer, candidates should note that the points are explained simply and as clearly as possible. They are also translated into the writer's own words, and the answer if handwritten, will fit into a side of paper with space to spare.

Passage B

Rats are very intelligent creatures; they have excellent memories and good learning skills. They also have problem solving abilities and have helped with many scientific breakthroughs. Domesticated rats often form strong bonds with their owner; one saved a man from a house fire. They are also sociable towards other rats, looking after sick members of their pack. They are very strong animals, able to chew through hard materials, survive for long periods without water and fall up to four metres without injury. Rats are very clean creatures and in some Asian cultures are associated with honesty, hard work and good luck. They are used in search and rescue missions to sniff out bombs and land mines. They can also detect tuberculosis and because of their ability to assess risks and make decisions they could be used to find a cure for gambling addictions.

Passage A

Mice have many negative attributes. They are noisy creatures that are destructive, chewing through objects and eating and contaminating food. They are nocturnal animals and appear in large numbers, hiding anywhere in the house. They breed quickly and are very hard to kill. They look and feel revolting and can bite and scratch. They are often associated with disease and even the plague.

Candidates can respond more effectively to this type of question in the following ways:

- explain points very **briefly**, sufficiently to show what the passage means
- **do not copy** whole phrases from the original
- write no more than **one side** of average handwriting
- **write informatively** and never comment on the content of the passage
- be careful to give only information that is **focused on the question**
- only **make a point once**.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/31

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

Most candidates used their time wisely and made a good attempt to answer the questions appropriately and to the best of their ability. They found the suggested length for **Question 1** adequate to complete the task and there was evidence of effective planning and wise use of facts and figures to argue their point of view. There were comparatively few answers to the composition that were incomplete or ineffectively finished. Candidates are reminded of the requirement of the rubric that they only respond to one of the three genres. Responding to more than one genre is something that certainly disadvantaged potentially good answers.

Candidates achieving high marks had thought carefully about their discursive/argumentative writing. Others needed sufficient information on either topic or to ensure their responses were original and developed. It is important also to plan the content of the descriptive and narrative writing. There was evidence that a great deal of thought had gone into the 'journey' description especially. Some thought as to the structure of each genre was also advisable as occasionally ideas were interesting and sound, but the sequencing and links within the essays needed to show cohesion. In the case of the narrative writing, it was important to think of an interesting ending and to ensure that the key events of the plot, including the climax, were properly managed. This was especially true of the composition about the letter in which the time span was vast. This required a balanced beginning, middle and ending in order to keep the reader engaged and not to rush the pace of denouement and spoil what were often effective plot lines. Thinking about character, plot and what will work as an unexpected 'sting in the tale' or engaging ending is as vital as a brief outline of plot on its own.

Many candidates considered the tone of the response to **Question 1** and realised that they could not be directly confrontational, but instead engage in a clever form of agreeing with some issues whilst at the same time directly using facts to challenge other claims in the headteacher's speech. In response to the first question about the benefits and advantages of Wikipedia, it was important that they realised that they were writing as a representative of the students at the school, and they needed to think of a subtle yet authoritative approach that did not insult the headteacher whose aim it was to take away something that all the students found useful for their education. It was also important that, when responding to a narrative topic, they understood the need to entertain their reader with interesting events, details and language.

Some of the answers to **Question 1** needed to move away from copying from the fact file supplied in the examination paper. It was necessary to expand on the data involved. Candidates are reminded that they should always try to use their own words and, if quoting facts and figures, they should incorporate their own views and ideas related to these. The only place in the Examination where they have to use quotations from a text is in **Question 2** of Papers 21, 22, and 23.

Part of the assessment in this paper was for writing in a clear English style and for writing accurately. Much of the writing was satisfactory and a number of candidates made very few errors. Spelling was often good. In some responses, there were inaccuracies when it came to the use of prepositions, tenses, articles, plurals and verb formations. Punctuation needed more care, and it was quite common to encounter sentence separation errors where candidates used commas instead of full stops. Commas were sometimes not used in important places or were used indiscriminately. Apostrophes were also inconsistently used. In the narratives, it was important that there was no confusion over tenses, especially to do with the time span involved in the story of a letter that had gone missing for a long time.

The best answers were able to call on a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. This was especially important when writing descriptions, in order to create images in the reader's mind. In narratives, a wide vocabulary added to the enjoyment and entertainment of the writing. In argumentative and discursive writing it was important to use vocabulary that was clear and which conveyed exact meaning. Over-complex vocabulary and convoluted sentences could confuse the reader. The ability to construct sentences of varied length for linking ideas and for effect was again one of the factors in awarding high marks. Effective sequencing of

ideas from one paragraph to another also indicated a thorough understanding of what constituted a good answer in **Question 1**, and control of subject matter in the compositions.

The mark scheme was, apart from the content of the first question, the same as has been used for a number of sessions, and it is very helpful in publicising what the Examiners look for. This is especially true of the Content and Structure section for composition.

Candidates are reminded of the necessity to write neatly and to use a pen with ink that is dark enough to be read easily. All Examiners are instructed to read every script, but in cases of difficulty the sense can easily be lost.

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: Imagine that you have heard the headteacher's speech at the school assembly. You decide to write a letter to the headteacher on behalf of yourself and your fellow students, protesting against the ban (of Wikipedia) and arguing why it should be lifted. Write a letter to the headteacher in which you should give the benefits and advantages of Wikipedia, explain why access to Wikipedia in school is necessary for your education and argue against the points made in the speech.

[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 of the passage. The content available for the answer was found both in one long speech by the headteacher and also in a Wikipedia Fact File.

Many of the answers were well executed as candidates not only related well to the topic, but were also able to call upon practical information which they could use as rebuttals against the prejudice of the headteacher's views. The strongest letters were from those candidates who understood that they were not just speaking for themselves, but representing the views of many unhappy students. Decorum often featured when concurring with the headteacher's concerns, but voice and opinion became stronger and more emotive when it came to evaluation of the facts. It was this effective balance that produced polite, but firm and well argued responses.

Many candidates understood the importance of a well-pitched introduction to the letter. The best responses showed empathy and understanding towards the headteacher before gradually introducing some illuminating facts and finally building up to a strong sense of indignation. Those who were initially too submissive (against such a strong adversary) found it difficult later on to find the power and momentum required to build up sufficient argument and authority in their writing. On the other hand, those who used a confrontational style found it difficult to show light and shade in their argument and tended to use the facts as weapons in themselves rather than using other rhetorical devices and persuasiveness to make their letters convincing.

Many candidates were able to integrate the material and provide a sustained argument with original persuasive techniques. Weaker responses needed to plan or structure their work to prevent a list of facts. It was important that responses provided effective and evaluative arguments and that there was a logical progression. Most responses engaged in providing arguments for lifting the ban. A few candidates described the features of Wikipedia or retold the headteacher's speech. Stronger answers were coherent, cohesive and built to a convincing conclusion of having proved a case. Weaker answers listed without development or linkage to the next point.

The tone of the best letters conceded one or two concerns before embarking on destroying the headteacher's speech. The tone needed to be secure and considered, especially where candidates were trying to be firm without being rude. Weaker responses needed to remember their audience or their own role, as they spoke only for themselves and not as a group representative. It was important that the letters covered a good range of points out of the possible nine. If four or five points were thoroughly evaluated and were convincing in their execution, then candidates could be awarded marks for Reading in the top two bands.

The mark for writing rewarded an apt and authoritative vocabulary and fluent style. Structure and sequence were also important, so that the letter did not read as direct counter argument. Copying out the fact file affected the writing mark as well as the reading mark. It was not expected that there would be errors in answers given a mark in Band 1 and there were few errors at the top mark of Band 2. Examiners gave credit for devices of persuasion, rhetoric or a sense of a communal voice present in the letters.

Candidates who planned their responses created a good sense of structure to their responses. They also showed the element of a strong voice and personal/collaborative sense of moral outrage that often characterises Band 3 type writing into implementing the devices and passion associated with Band 2 and above. Responses awarded lower marks for writing were as a result of candidates needing to move away from facts to counteract the headteacher's assertions. They were required to offer their own opinions or situations to add the vital personal response.

Section 2: Composition

Candidates had to choose one of the following topics and write about 350 to 450 words. There were 25 marks available for this task, 13 of which were for Content and Structure and 12 for Style and Accuracy.

Narrative and descriptive writing was often quite engaging and poignant. It was important that these responses provided sufficient structure to make the content convincing and show that descriptions were not a list of random visual images. The discursive essay on an invention that should not have been invented was popular owing to the fact that candidates could demonstrate knowledge of the atomic bomb or choose weapons generally as their subject.

Candidates are reminded of the word length. Some candidates wrote at greater length than was indicated. They occasionally sustained their writing successfully, but sometimes wrote with more care and interest near the beginning and with less care near the end, and thus the overall quality was affected.

Some candidates made a rubric error and tried to answer some or all of the topics. The Examiners were instructed to assess all the answers, which were often very short of the word length, and to give the mark for the best one of them. Often candidates did not read the rubric until too late and added a postscript to this effect. It is therefore important that candidates are reminded in future to read the instructions carefully.

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- 1. If you could travel back in time, what invention would you prevent from being created and why?**
- 2. Is there any point in working hard to gain academic qualifications when so many people now become rich and famous without them, or buy fake ones?**

Both of these tasks were popular. For both options, there were two halves that need to be considered before embarking on writing – one simpler than the other. It is important that the candidate has enough content points to develop both parts of the question, to ensure that the Content and Structure marks are secure. Thus candidates are recommended to plan their responses carefully – they need to ensure they have enough material to write beyond three well-developed paragraphs without repetition; that the arguments are clearly structured and sequenced, supported by the use of connectives; and that there is sustained development in their arguments. The content provided also affects the Style and Accuracy mark because there needs to be sufficient links in the argument and sufficient vocabulary to discuss the topic.

In response to the popular **option (a)**, the invention here was inevitably a gun or the atomic bomb. It was clear that many candidates knew some historical and factual aspects behind these inventions. However, it was important that candidates remembered that this was a discursive essay with a specific focus. Candidates are reminded that they should ensure that they have enough to write beyond two or three promising paragraphs. Many responses went straight back to the time of the invention and an incident that took place. For example, in the case of the atomic bomb, Hiroshima was used as the terrible event that provided the only argument cited as a reason for the bomb not to have been used. It was clear that there were some passionate views about the awful consequences and graphic details were provided. Often responses needed to provide more than one source of information or to argue about the circumstances surrounding the invention. It was important to cover the 'why' aspect of the question that invited personal views. Some candidates re-used last session's passage on computer games and the arguments against them. These responses tended to be unfocused as the unique personal viewpoint was missing. Occasionally, there was an unusual 'pet hate', such as the i-pad. These started out well, but the response moved on quite quickly to other similar products that annoyed them rather than producing an argument for them not to have been invented in the first place. It is important that responses sustain a sequenced development of their argument, and that paragraphs are substantial in content and length. Candidates who intend to answer questions like these need to be aware that they understand the full and precise demands of the particular topic and question.

Option **(b)** was a popular choice. Candidates had a great deal to say about the value of education for many reasons for working hard for well earned qualifications. In a question like this with two parts, it was good that candidates consider both aspects of the question – here, this was of equal importance. Responses mentioned later career change and fulfilment of potential and skills acquisition as important factors in favour of working hard. It was often clear that candidates would never consider cheating or falsifying credentials and therefore lacked the ability to understand the type of people who do get through life like this. Candidates found it difficult to find ideas beyond ‘it isn’t fair’ or ‘you might get found out if you fake your qualifications’.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

1. **You come across a shop in a side street which you have never noticed before. You enter, and are amazed at what you see. Describe the interior of the shop and the things on sale there.**
2. **Describe what you see from the window during a journey by road or rail.**

Candidates answered both these topics fairly well. There were only a few cases where there was confusion with narrative, generally when there was too much preamble before the main focus of the question began. Both descriptions were often treated in a panoramic way, by panning around the shop and pointing out features or driving along a road and treating the landscape in the same way. Better descriptions were those that created an emotional journey and delved into deeper associations that reflected aspects of the writer’s past or present state of mind – any objects or aspects of landscape and wildlife which seemed to them worthy of looking at and reflecting upon.

Good descriptions see things from different angles and invent at least a short time span. Most importantly, they have a context. In both options it was up to the candidate to provide a context that took the reader somewhere unique and that was pertinent to the senses. A sense of mystery was indicated in **option (a)** and a parade of passing images that created associations in **option (b)**. The latter option provided a linear shape for the responses. The shop description had its own shape and movement so that the reader was guided through the place, rather than not knowing where they were at any given time.

Option (a) provided some wonderful imaginative shop interiors that ventured more into fantasy than real life. The strongest pieces made use of a tangible and evocative description of the shopkeeper; these characters provided the context, and the contents of the shop were extensions of their personality and quirkiness. One old sea captain appeared to be a life-sized advertisement for pipe tobacco until the smoke exhaled as he coughed. The clothes he was wearing and the resurrected misadventures at sea reflected in his eyes were as significant in the writing as the six foot stuffed marlin on the wall or the murky green lighting that led the way to the ‘deep’, otherwise known as the cellar. Readers of this quality of description emerged from the shop feeling that they had learned about a real place and a real person. It is not fantasy or completely different images that capture one’s attention, but the exaggeration of a person and place we believe we have seen before but not taken enough notice of. Writing about what you know well works when exaggeration is used to create what seems like the unusual. Other descriptions were more panoramic; candidates seemed eager to scan in and around the shop but needed to allow for an opportunity for reflection or for the senses to be awakened by the unusual. Time is needed to savour new places. There were many shops with so many weird and wonderful creatures – from miniature dinosaurs to glaciers under domes of glass – that only a couple of items remained with the reader. Candidates also needed a wide range of appropriate vocabulary in order to make the descriptions come alive. Not enough detail was provided when things were ‘awesome’ or ‘amazing’.

Option (b) produced some excellent descriptions of places so real and yet so unusual that they made the reader want to visit the area. The successful road or train journeys were based on reality, but with a twist of exaggeration and telling detail. The better ones created a parallel between the external landscape and the person’s emotional journey. There was effective detail about vegetation and wildlife, from llamas to eagles, and speculation by one candidate about whether it was ‘his eagle’, the same one that would be waiting on the gate post when he arrived.

Question 4: Narrative writing

1. **A letter turns up which has been lost in the post for ten years. Write a story which explains the effect of this letter when it is finally delivered.**
2. **‘Slow but steady wins the race.’ Write a story to illustrate this saying.**

The narrative responses sometimes captured the sense of trauma, and most managed to convey the situation, mostly in the context of a loved one. Responses tended to be straightforward or even accounts which could have benefited with more attention to the description of main characters and as well as better planning overall. For **option (a)**, the lost letters often turned out to be about lost love and missed chances. Candidates tended to consider the past event and work backwards when it would have been better to pay more attention to the here and now, for example whether the characters were happy or sad. Then the letter could have played a better role by introducing 'what ifs?' and 'what now?', if any options were still available. It is easy to underplay the character of the post deliverer, but as films show when they zoom in and focus on these characters, exaggeration is an essential part of everyday life if it is to lead to something extraordinary. Often there were too many characters to manage at once: husband, children, grandparents and neighbours in what was essentially a drama that includes the mail deliverer, the main character and a missed opportunity, not necessarily another person, but prize money not claimed or careers that could have changed the past, for example. The most important aspect of a narrative, especially one that spans any amount of time, is considering a time frame when planning the story line. There should be enough variation in light and shade so that the reader has the opportunity to visualise the present, consider the past and contemplate on what might have been. This last aspect was often simply one sentence so the reader was not enlightened as to the main reason of the missed chance.

For the race in **option (b)**, there were some effective pieces that conveyed struggles to overcome adversity, to take the high moral ground and do the right thing, even if the concept had been taken literally. The idea of the race as metaphorical was not often used. Many average to below average responses used the fable of the tortoise and the hare, and therefore were very similar or disguised imitations of the same. Here, the responses needed to provide detail of setting or character, and the unfolding of events was predictable. Vocabulary was important in deciding upon the level of style and accuracy and thus responses needed to show a wide and varied vocabulary.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/32

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

Most candidates used their time wisely and made a good attempt to answer the questions appropriately and to the best of their ability. They found the suggested length for **Question 1** adequate to complete the task and there were comparatively few answers to the composition that were incomplete or ineffectively finished. There was evidence that to produce good responses, candidates thought carefully about their writing before they started the composition. Planning was essential for the argumentative/discursive writing, if only to check that they had enough to say and that they could develop each of their arguments at sufficient length. It was more difficult to plan the descriptive and narrative writing, but some thought as to the structure of each genre was also advisable. In the case of the narrative writing it was important to think of an interesting ending and to ensure that the important events of the plot, including the climax, were properly managed.

Many candidates understood the importance of writing for a reader, or audience. For the answer to **Question 1** it was important that they realised that they were writing an article, and they needed to think who might read the article and what sort of voice they should adopt. It was also important that when responding to a narrative topic, they understood the need to entertain their reader with interesting events, details and language.

Candidates are reminded in **Question 1** that they should always use their own words and not copy out whole phrases or sentences from the passage provided. The only place in the Examination where they have to use quotations from a text is in **Question 2** of Papers 21, 22, and 23.

Part of the assessment in this paper was for writing in a clear English style and for writing accurately. Much of the writing was satisfactory and a number of candidates made very few errors. Spelling was often good. Punctuation needed more care, and it was quite common to encounter sentence separation errors where candidates used commas instead of full stops. Commas were sometimes not used in important places or were used indiscriminately. Apostrophes were inconsistently used. In the narratives, it was important that there was no confusion over tenses.

The best answers demonstrated a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. This was especially important when writing descriptions, in order to create images in the reader's mind. In narrative, a wide vocabulary added to the enjoyment and entertainment of the writing. In argumentative and discursive writing, it was important to use vocabulary that was clear and which conveyed exact meaning. Over-complex vocabulary and convoluted sentences could confuse the reader. The ability to construct sentences of varied length for linking ideas and for effect was one of the factors in awarding high marks.

The mark scheme was, apart from the content of the first question, the same as has been used for a number of sessions, and it is very helpful in publicising what the Examiners look for. This is especially true of the content and structure section for composition.

Candidates are reminded of the necessity to write neatly and to use a pen with ink that is dark enough to be read easily. All Examiners are instructed to read every script, but in cases of difficulty the sense can easily be lost.

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: A documentary on television captures your attention. In this programme two families have recently taken part in a research project looking into the positive and negative effects of television on family life. Family X agreed to the removal of all television programmes and film for a period of three months. Family Y were asked to carry on as normal. Write an article for the website on the subject of television and family life. In your article you should identify the positive and negative aspects of television in the home and evaluate the Role played by television in family life. Base what you write on the ideas found in the transcripts printed in the examination paper.

[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 of the passage. The content available for the answer was found in two short transcripts in the voices of characters from family X and family Y.

Many of the answers were well executed, particularly because candidates produced an article and not a report. A report would have selected and reproduced the substance of the transcripts whilst an article created an argument and integrated ideas and details from the views of the two families. The best of the answers did exactly this.

Many wrote a good introduction, the object of which was to advise the reader what sort of ground the article was to cover. It was also the only part of the article where the writer could present general ideas that were relevant but not exactly part of the transcripts. Where candidates used extraneous ideas from the transcripts, they drifted away from the matter in hand which was the effect of television on the family.

Candidates who focused on relevant points in the transcripts achieved well. They saw the contrast between the two families, one of which was largely dysfunctional until they started to go out together, and the other which sat down together to watch films and used television as a jumping board for discussion about programmes. Candidates realised therefore that the fault did not lie in television itself but with the people who used or misused it. The very best answers picked up the ideas of addiction (family X) and 'couch potatoes' (which family Y mentioned as something they were not) and saw that it was a matter of whether they allowed television to dominate them or whether they could control television and acknowledge its uses. Candidates who argued this could then use the detail of documentaries that encouraged travel abroad and various interests and careers to support their line of thought.

Candidates who were given fewer marks for reading needed to use the content of the transcripts and not merely to reproduce it. If they did, their answers began to look more like a report and less like an article and the facts were arranged much more as a list than an integrated argument. The commonest of these reproductions came from the beginning of the second paragraph of family X transcript ('Early withdrawal symptoms...favourite programme') and the end of the second paragraph, and at the beginning of the fourth paragraph of the Family Y transcript. There were considerable copies of the quotations 'instilled a passion' and 'nurture a caring instinct' which suggested that the candidates did not understand these expressions.

The whole point of the article was that it reflected the views of the writer and not the two families. There was no reason why the articles should not mention the two families although some studiously avoided doing so. In the end it did not necessarily make any difference to the marks.

The mark for writing rewarded an apt and authoritative vocabulary and fluent style. Structure and sequence were also important, so that the article did not read as a list of facts. Copying out the text affected the writing mark as well as the reading mark. It was not expected that there would be errors in answers given a mark in Band 1 and there were few errors at the top mark of Band 2. Where the voice of the writer was discernible, credit was given.

Section 2: Composition

Candidates had to choose one of the following topics and write about 350 to 450 words. There were 25 marks available for this task, 13 of which were for Content and Structure and 12 for Style and Accuracy.

The quality of the descriptive writing was quite high, which suggested that candidates were well prepared for this type of writing. There was also some improvement in the argumentative/discursive writing from previous sessions. Candidates planned their work satisfactorily and provided adequate content with less repetition than has been evident previously. The narratives varied in quality. Some candidates needed to be more aware of how stories work and are shaped and managed.

Most candidates wrote within the specified length. Others wrote at considerably greater lengths than indicated. They occasionally sustained their writing successfully, but sometimes they wrote with monotony and interest near the beginning and with less care near the end, and thus the overall quality was affected.

A few candidates made a rubric error and tried to answer some or all of the topics. The Examiners were instructed to try to assess all the answers, which were often seriously short, and to give the mark for the best one of them.

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **Do you think that it is right for English, in all its forms, to become the most important world language?**
- (b) **'The School curriculum provides everything that the average teenager needs to know for adult life.' What are your views on this statement?**

Both of these topics were of interest to the candidates who attempted them and they were generally answered quite well. Candidates who intend to answer questions like these need to be well prepared. They need to ensure that they have plenty of material to write beyond three well-developed paragraphs without repetition and that the arguments are clearly structured and sequenced, supported by the use of connectives, and that there is a sustained development of their argument.

For option (a), the general view was that English should become the most important world language and arguments commonly put forward included the number of countries already using English as a first or second language and the extent to which it was taught. It was the language of business and diplomacy and people used the Internet and watched television in English. Some candidates explained that it was an easy language, and one answer included the case of a candidate who had come to the School knowing no English and could speak and write it fluently within five months. One candidate wrote enthusiastically about the wealth of literature written in English. Most of these arguments were capable of worthwhile development. Those who ran short of material could also have considered arguments against the supremacy of English such as the numbers of people speaking languages like Spanish and Chinese and the fact that languages fall out of use in alarming numbers. It is always useful to consider both sides of an argument if one is short of content.

Option (b) was answered satisfactorily overall and candidates had plenty to write about. A case could be put forward for a curriculum which gave a solid foundation of knowledge and skills and which provided insight on how to study in a disciplined manner, but most candidates argued for a number of different experiences in adult life that were not covered in School. These were developed at appropriate length although they often needed to be presented in a more orderly manner. They were rarely seen as being part of a curriculum, but were more like activities or something loosely to do with School.

Neither topic involved abstract thinking, so few candidates wrote long, rambling sentences in vocabulary that was difficult to follow. Thus, the marks for Style and Accuracy were generally in the middle to top mark bands.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

- (a) **Write a descriptive account entitled 'The Flower Seller'.**
- (b) **You have to get to an important event or meeting, but the vehicle you are in is held up in a traffic jam. Describe what is going on around you and your feelings during the delay.**

Candidates answered both these topics well. There were a few cases where candidates needed to focus on description rather than narrative – there were too many events which took place over too great a time span and in more than one location. Nevertheless, these usually had sufficient descriptive language for Examiners to give some credit, particularly in Style and Accuracy.

Good descriptions see things from different angles and invent at least a short time span. Most importantly, they have a context. In option (b) the context was written into the topic. It was the event or meeting to which the narrator was going. This allowed for a series of thoughts and emotions about being late. For example, one candidate was late for a performance in a play and was sure that it would start without her. Others were

afraid that they would miss an important meeting and would be fired. This context gave extra depth to the writing, which otherwise may have been restricted to a series of images of sweaty interiors, angry honking lines of vehicles. Being able to describe both images of the senses and emotions ensured that the writing had variety and interest. A few candidates provided too much of an introduction, and one at least wrote the whole side before reaching the end of the traffic jam. It was important to address the topic throughout the description and to sustain interest in it.

Option **(b)** produced some excellent writing. Here the context was the flower shop or stall and the best of the flower sellers merged into their backgrounds. There were some touching creations of character. One seller was as beautiful and delicate as her flowers, and the candidate created a picture worthy of a talented painter. Another flower seller presented the writer with a withered rose, and it was not until the end of the description that he realised that she was blind. The whole of the writing led up to what was in the end a superb literary surprise for the reader. What made these descriptions so good was the background of flowers and the way in which the flower sellers fitted into it. Sometimes just the naming of flowers was enough to create a picture in the mind. The least good descriptions were of flower sellers who could have been anybody. One candidate wrote about a male seller who was no more than a handsome man whom she fancied.

The important feature of these descriptions was the choice of images and the way in which they were sequenced, so that the writing did not fall flat. Candidates needed a wide range of appropriate vocabulary in order to make the descriptions come alive.

Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a)** 'Nothing could have survived that explosion, so what on earth is that climbing out of the...!'
Use this sentence at an important point in your story.
- (b)** Write a story in which greed plays an important part.

Some of the features of a good description are needed in a narrative to make it alive and interesting for the reader. The reader needs to believe that he or she is there, and it is only through the choice of striking event and detail, told in precise and exciting language, that this will happen. An interesting approach to option **(b)** was the personal story of a girl who was greedy and who suffered a series of unhappy experiences before learning her lesson. This did not attempt to cover too wide a time span and allowed for the account of some harrowing feelings. Some of these narratives, especially those for option **(b)** were more like newspaper reports than stories. This was particularly so where stories about greed were presented as a morality. They were often tales of deception by business partners or relatives who wanted all the family fortune. Here, some of the characters were unrealistic, and candidates had to tell too much of the story of their lives, which read as a list of facts.

Option **(a)** was often well done. There were comparatively few unrealistic accounts of little green monsters and horrible aliens, but where this approach was taken, the results were sometimes quite effective. Candidates were careful to choose the word that filled the gap in the quotation, and there were many different situations that were carefully described. The quotation was a ready made, effective climax and in many cases it was well prepared and introduced. This helped to make a good story at the very point where weaknesses normally occur. There were some touching accounts of rescues from burning buildings, and there seemed to be as many happy endings as tragic ones.

As a postscript, it was noted how many words and phrases were used from passages either in this session's papers 21,22 or 23 or in recent papers.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/33

Directed Writing and Composition

General comments

For **Question 1**, on the whole, candidates engaged well with the account given of his life by Daniel Li in the radio interview and produced credible conversations which made use of the material in the passage. Many responses were structured effectively to allow for developed arguments based on the details in the text. Candidates who created two distinct voices for the dialogue were often more able to move beyond quoting and listing Daniel Li's comments and there were some strong evaluations of both his personal characteristics and the sacrifices he had made. In a few cases, candidates found the conversational style required difficult to adopt and produced monologues or dialogues in which one character provided prompts for the other's observations. These were less successful in achieving marks for both the reading and writing strands because there was limited scope for the reading material to be debated and evaluated. There was less copying or simple quoting of the details from the passage than in previous years which helped candidates of all abilities to address the task successfully.

In composition pieces, most candidates showed a clear awareness of the different demands of the genres and there was some excellent writing in all three categories. Candidates who had sufficient material to sustain their responses and could organise their writing appropriately often compensated for technical weaknesses in spelling and punctuation. Candidates are reminded of ensuring that sentences are carefully constructed to ensure clarity of expression and fluency of style. The use of commas instead of full stops or the lack of full stops sometimes resulted in pieces which became difficult to read and affected their overall coherence.

The great majority of candidates were able to use their time sensibly to avoid rushed endings or incomplete compositions. Narratives were mostly resolved purposefully and many argumentative/discursive pieces had clear concluding paragraphs. Descriptions in which candidates made use of a short time span to help organise their writing were often more cohesive and controlled. Candidates are reminded that descriptive responses can be more difficult to shape and to ensure that paragraphing is secure.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1: Imagine that you and a school friend heard the broadcast. You disagree on whether you would want to become like Daniel Li. Write the dialogue you have with your friend, in which you discuss Daniel Li's life so far and argue about the desirability of becoming successful in business at a young age. In your dialogue you should identify and comment on the personal characteristics which have made Daniel Li successful, evaluate the sacrifices he has made and whether they are worth it.

[25 marks]

25 marks were available for this question, of which 15 were for the quality of their writing and 10 awarded for the use of the reading material. The content available for the answer was to be found in a transcript of a radio interview.

There were many candidates who successfully integrated a range of details from the passage into their responses, especially those concerning the sacrifices made by Daniel in pursuit of his career. Weaker responses included a copy of the sentence in which Daniel listed having 'no friends, no girlfriend', rarely saw his family and had no qualifications. More successful responses examined each of these points separately, developing their ideas on the importance of friends and family for a typical teenager. Straightforward evaluations such as 'I can't imagine not being able to hang out with friends' or 'I rely on my family to be there for me whatever happens' were common and helped to lift marks for reading into Band 2 if such comments

were consistent. Many candidates also pointed out that Daniel's lack of qualifications could be a disadvantage if his business ventures failed and some made valid inferences about Daniel's feelings, possibly lonely and isolated. In evaluating the sacrifices Daniel had made, the most successful responses made more use of inferences gleaned from the text rather than relying on the more straightforward statements Daniel made. His employment of a bodyguard was seen as an indication of the extreme dangers involved in some of his business ventures, for example, and his failure to become a musician suggested that a more creative dream was unfulfilled.

Candidates who attached equal importance to both parts of the set question, Daniel's personal characteristics and the sacrifices he had made, and attempted to sustain a clearly evaluative approach throughout were awarded the highest marks. The identification and evaluation of Daniel Li's personal characteristics featured less in the weaker responses, which tended to focus more on the sacrifices he had made. Straightforward inferences about his personal characteristics were sensibly made by many candidates, such as Daniel's determination and resilience, illustrated by his ability to overcome financial setbacks, his willingness to take risks or his patience in negotiating deals. A valid case was made by many that Daniel was a humble character from a 'down-to-earth background' because he was 'embarrassed' about his wealth. Some perceptive responses showed a subtle grasp of the text to argue that Daniel's embarrassment was false because he boasted about the extent of his wealth in detail in the interview and dismissed ordinary teenagers' lives as 'boring and conventional.' Other perceptive observations included Daniel's ungrateful neglect of his family due to greed for money, his distrustfulness of others after early business setbacks and his inability to relax. Such inferences were often supported by close and careful reference of the passage. Comments about how much his business ability was inherited or encouraged by his family, what he could do with the money he had made or what kind of politics he would want to get involved in were less securely based on the passage itself and did not gain the highest marks.

Many candidates adopted a credible conversational style, often with the lively banter characteristic of teenage speech. Responses which were carefully planned and assigned different points of view to each speaker were generally more effective. Arguments between the speakers resulted in clear discussion of the issues as is required for Band 2 and above. In high-scoring responses, different aspects of Daniel's character or life style were addressed by both speakers. Daniel's drive and energy, for example, were sometimes suggested as admirable qualities by one speaker but countered by the other as obsessive and greedy. In weaker responses, the two characters often echoed each others' ideas or one character simply prompted the other with questions such as 'What do you think of Daniel's life style?' and there was little argument. It was often difficult for weaker answers to provide an argument that the sacrifices made by Daniel were worthwhile and sometimes conversations petered out when the arguments became too one-sided. Interestingly, candidates of all abilities were more persuasive when arguing that Daniel's wealth was not worth the sacrifice of teenage life, education and family. Better responses balanced the arguments, with each issue discussed by both characters. Some weak responses needed to ensure points were not listed in a disconnected way, ensuring that each character was assigned a range of ideas which were discussed by both speakers. While there were many responses in which the authentic, lively style of the conversation helped to create a secure sense of audience for Band 2, a few were perhaps too close to teenage vernacular and did not have the fluency and control, or the rounded discussion of ideas, required here. It is important that candidates ensure that the style is appropriate, for example, by not relying on slang or phonetic spelling such as 'geddit' or 'gonna'. More able responses were written in a style which was suitable, and still accurate and clear.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2: Argumentative/discursive writing

- (a) **Discuss why it is easier to go to war than to achieve peace**
- (b) **Discuss an invention which changed peoples' lives in some way, commenting on its impact at the time and why it still plays an important role today.**

These were both quite popular questions and candidates generally structured their writing sensibly with an introduction and concluding paragraph. In option (a), candidates often cited the inherent greed or aggression of human beings as a reason why it is easier to go to war than to achieve peace, and informed examples from history as well as contemporary conflicts were given with some authority to illustrate the points made. Better responses included a range of ideas on why people resort easily to war, including ancient enmities, competition for resources and the posturing of leaders. Where candidates also addressed the problems of achieving peace, the response was often more cohesive and rounded. The difficulties of complex negotiations or compromise were discussed by some, again with illustrations from the past. Weaker

answers needed to ensure they had enough varying content points or that the illustrations supported their point rather than taking over from the argument. The settlement after World War I was mentioned frequently as an example of peace treaties which cause more war, though the explanation sometimes constituted almost half of the response. The majority of responses were well organised and were adequately paragraphed. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their writing carefully to ensure they have a range of relevant points to make which are substantial enough to create developed paragraphs.

Candidates selecting option **(b)**, the more discursive task in this category, who chose an appropriate invention on which they could write knowledgeably and who addressed both its impact at the time and why its influence continued were generally well-rewarded for Content and Structure. Mobile phones and the Internet were popular choices of inventions and many candidates were knowledgeable about the origins and early impact of both, as well as later developments which have made such a profound impact on young people's lives. There were some lively accounts of huge, brick-like early phones which were expensive and clumsy, compared with the tiny, palm-held phones of today. In responses which were given high marks, there was some balanced discussion of the pitfalls as well as the benefits of these inventions, such as the prevalence of undesirable web sites or bullying by mobile phone. Weaker responses tended to include an invention such as the light bulb or the wheel without having knowledge of their origins. Some ran out of relevant material and this meant that paragraphs were short and ideas were undeveloped. There were also some choices which were not really inventions, such as education or charities.

Question 3: Descriptive writing

- (a) Describe the surroundings and your emotions at a time when you felt very alone.**
- (b) Imagine that you are up in a hot air balloon. Describe what you see below and how the experience makes you feel.**

There were some excellent responses to both questions, though option **(b)** was a more popular choice than option **(a)**. For descriptive responses, candidates are reminded of the need to ensure that tenses are controlled as this affects the Style and Accuracy mark. Sentences with no active verb were also common in weaker responses to both descriptive questions, for example: 'The clouds floating by like cotton wool. The heat of the gas blowing into the balloon and the creaking of the basket.'

Successful responses to option **(a)** created some effective, often heart-rending descriptions and focused their attention on physical details which reflected the emotions of the narrator. Able responses did not over-explain the scenario, but the reasons for the narrator's loneliness were hinted at by the use of details such as the voices of arguing parents or the ticking clock in a hospital waiting room. A few candidates described the sensation of being alone as a pleasurable experience, focusing on the stillness and peace of a walk through a forest or an evening alone with a good book. Weaker answers wrote about vague emotions rather than using observed detail. The situation was set out in a more prosaic way, explaining rather than describing how the narrator came to be alone: 'I had had an argument with my family and was sitting in my bedroom', for example, does not evoke atmosphere as is required for Band 3. Some focused exclusively on the feelings of the narrator without grounding such observations in a credible scenario. These responses needed to ensure phrasing was varied and not simply a listing of synonyms for loneliness. For example, one candidate wrote 'I just felt isolated and alone, there was no one I could turn to' without a clear indication of where and why the narrator was alone. Good responses were written in either present or past tense but were consistent throughout. The mark for Style and Accuracy in many pieces was limited by insecurity in the use of tenses. Weaker answers slipped between past and present tense: 'I could feel a pain in my chest as I walk down the road and I felt completely alone'.

Option **(b)** elicited sound structured writing on the whole, with many candidates using the short time span of a balloon ride effectively to control their ideas. This approach allowed for a variety of emotions such as the fear of taking off and the shock of landing, as well as the sense of wonder commonly evoked by the flight itself. Candidates were given high marks where images created were striking and original. One candidate wrote of the world below as a 'jigsaw puzzle' and another described the 'sudden pointlessness of all that scurrying about from up here'. Feelings of invincibility and power were evoked by images of heaven or kingship such as 'I hold the whole world in the palm of my hand' and one successful piece focused intently on feelings of terror as the narrator left the ground and graphically described the deafening creaking of the basket as the balloon lurched from side to side. Less effective pieces relied on more predictable images such as the 'cotton wool clouds' and the people far below looking like ants, and there was some rather mechanical use of the senses, with a paragraph each on sights, sounds, smells, for example, which addressed the task though needed to ensure there were distinctively interesting range of details. In general, most candidates performed well on this task and showed some imagination.

Question 4: Narrative writing

- (a) 'At last I could see a light at the end of the tunnel.' Use this sentence either to begin or to end a story.
- (b) You see an advertisement in a local newspaper which says: 'Are you brave and adventurous? Then telephone this number and change your life.' Start the story with the phone call you make.

Option (a) was more commonly chosen and candidates wrote some engaging narratives. A few candidates addressed the title metaphorically with stories about a particular ordeal which was approaching an end. These often worked very well as the nature of the metaphorical tunnel was the candidate's choice and provided an effective structure for the narrative. Better responses which used this approach included stories about the struggle to leave an abusive family or a difficult journey away from an unsuitable set of friends. Most candidates interpreted the title literally and there were many scenarios involving abandoned mine shafts and railway tunnels, some of which were well constructed, convincing accounts.

Where candidates had planned their stories carefully, narratives often opened with some immediacy and interest, with the protagonist lost or being chased in a tunnel, for example, with the reason for this predicament recounted as flashback or perhaps only hinted at with some subtlety. Such control over structure requires careful pre-planning. More straightforward narratives involving short cuts home with fearful consequences, such as oncoming trains, were also often successful. Weaker responses needed to ensure the reader was clear about why the protagonist was in the tunnel or ensure the explanations were not too convoluted as to affect impact of the experience itself. In some cases of excellent writing, switches in tense from past to present added to the urgency and drama of particular incidences, but in others, insecure use of tenses and grammar limited the mark for Style and Accuracy.

Responses for option (b) which showed evidence of careful planning were more successful, in particular those in which the challenge presented to the protagonist on the phone was credible and well-conceived. Expeditions up mountains or through jungles were quite believable and better responses focused on the experience itself, whereas weaker responses became over-involved in the phone call or the identity of the challenger. A number of responses needed to ensure events were clearly explained, had a sense of purpose and were credible. It was difficult for the reader to engage with the characters in the story if time was not spent on building the scenario and if there were too many characters who became involved in a complicated plot. Candidates are advised to construct stories with believable content and to sequence their narratives so that the reader is kept engaged by the events and characters depicted.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/04
Coursework Portfolio

General comments

This coursework option is unique to this syllabus in that it offers candidates the opportunity to express personal ideas and emotions on topics that are important to them. It allows them time to develop as writers and to widen their experience of language.

Many of the candidates entered for this session took full advantage of the course and there were many examples of excellent writing. A particular improvement was in the choice of topic for the first assignment and in the style of writing, which was frequently more lively and interesting than the impersonality of standard essays. It was clear that many Centres had thought carefully about how to achieve this improvement.

An increasing number of candidates were well trained to engage with ideas and opinions in the reading material selected for Assignment 3 and argued in some depth. Others needed to make detailed reference to the text and to develop or argue against what they had read.

Assessment

Overall the quality of assessment was again good and the Moderators made small adjustments to bring all Centres into line with one another.

- For writing, it is important that the quantity of errors in the Assignments is taken into consideration, particularly sentence separation error where commas are used instead of full stops. Final drafts should be corrected for errors. Where standards in the Centre were particularly high, some of the marking was too severe for the frequency and nature of errors, particularly at the bottom of the mark range.
- For reading, it is necessary to consider how far the candidate has summarised the reading material or used it as a stimulus for their own creative writing. Sometimes the marking was severe where candidates limited themselves to a discussion of ideas and opinions expressed by the writer and developed their work in relevant and well sequenced paragraphs.
- Where several sets with different teachers were entered for the component, it was important that internal moderation took place to ensure that all classes have been marked at the same standard. Most internal moderation procedures were sound, and Centres nearly always succeeded in establishing one reliable rank order. Where there may be a noticeable case that one set was marked at a different standard from the others, the adjustment must ensure that a single rank order is provided.

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

Submitting the portfolios

Centres are reminded that the three assignments, together with the first draft of them, must be securely fastened to the Individual Candidate Record Card by means of a treasury tag or a staple. The work should not be sent in plastic folders or bulky and heavy ring binders. The marks appearing on the Individual Candidate Record Card and the MS1 (mark sheet) should be the **final internally moderated marks**, both for reading and for writing. Where a mark is altered at internal moderation, the mark on the folder itself should also be changed. The candidate number and the name of the teaching group should also be filled in on these documents.

Copies of articles used for Assignment 3

The Moderator reads each article used for Assignment 3 in order to identify the ideas and opinions of the candidate used in the response to the task. It was therefore essential that copies of articles were included with the folders.

Drafts

One early draft of **one** of the three assignments was required with each folder. It was not necessary to submit more than one draft in total. The Moderators read the drafts in the hope of seeing advice for improvement by the teacher and improvements made by candidates in the final version. The best of the drafts had comments by the teacher that led to editing and revising by the candidate. It is not permitted for Centres to correct the spelling and punctuation of the draft. While some indication of the work that needed to be carried out on the draft was entirely in order, it was essential that all changes should be the original work of the candidate. By using the drafting process in this way, candidates could learn the art of considering a range of improvements to their work and thus become better writers.

Comments on specific assignments

Assignment 1

This year there was an improved selection of topics. There were many which were unusual and which appeared to have been chosen by candidates out of personal interest. Some of these were as follows:

Reality is not what you see on television; Banning the Internet; Gay marriage in my country; My love of food; Is it right for teenagers to fall in love? Changing the minimum driving age; A visit to the art museum; Should Shakespeare be taught in Schools? The dangers of Facebook; Playing the flute. The idea of a series of 'How to...' topics such as How to be a librarian, an electrician and (best of all) a gym teacher, was effective.

As usual there were accounts of community service weeks and logs of visits abroad with the School. In addressing this type of topic, candidates generally remembered that it was important that they wrote factually, adding commentary as appropriate and not trespassing on the style of the second assignment.

Many Centres used a range of forms of writing for this assignment, such as speeches, conversations or letters. This often meant that candidates wrote with a sense of audience that was lacking in traditional essays. An increasing number of candidates also used the first person to express their views and this instantly made their writing more personal.

Previous reports advised that the formal research essay (topics such as euthanasia, capital punishment, cloning and abortion) was not best suited to this assignment as it does not generate original and engaging writing. Firstly, such essays usually lacked the personal involvement that gave them life and interest. Secondly, research often meant copying whole sentences or making a close paraphrase.

Assignment 2

Topics for this assignment ranged from fiction, through descriptions of places (from personal experience) to moments from candidates' own lives. All three of these approaches were equally effective. The writing was often a good check on the quality of the candidate's vocabulary and ability to write in a particular style.

Many of the stories and even the autobiographical fragments were accounts of sad or violent events. Autobiographically these were often moving; in fiction they were sometimes less than convincing, although good writers could make them so. It would be a good exercise to write stories that made something singular out of satisfying events that illustrated the better side of life. It appeared as though 'The Assassin' in all its forms was no longer a task conducted by Centres, as requested in previous Principal Examiner Reports.

Some of the fiction was good and some thought was given to endings of stories. Titles were important since they whetted the appetite. They included:

Inexplicable twist; It just happened; Living the dream; In the blink of an eye; Never ending nightmare; For you, Olivia; He who laughs last; Hell hath no fury; Hill of doom and Girls are a different species.

There were some excellent travelogues such as *Arrival in Mozambique*; *Memories of Havana*; *Marrakesh* and *A day in Oman*.

Successful autobiographical topics included *Family Event*, *A serious illness* and *My accident*.

Assignment 3

Some of the argumentative writing submitted for this assignment was of a very high quality. The best candidates selected points made by the writers of their chosen articles and explored them thoroughly. The language they used was often powerful and fluent, and this assignment sometimes demonstrated their best writing skills.

Centres often allowed candidates to choose their own texts. This choice should be carefully monitored to ensure that they are suitable and will allow the candidate to perform well. For example, a common choice was that of a factual news item which had no ideas or opinions at all and was often simple and brief. The candidate could at best only argue with the facts as they were reported. Another type of article that was again factual, this time from the Internet, was a set of ten things one could do to help in the fight against global warming. Here, the advice was straightforward and sensible, and there was nothing to argue against and very little to develop. Finally, literary texts, although appropriate if handled according to the mark scheme, were often too long (such as the whole of *Of Mice and Men*) or likely to lead candidates into discussing the language and literary devices. It was important to confine oneself to facts, ideas and opinions.

Good responses engaged with ideas and opinions, weaker responses tended to reproduce or summarise parts of the article and the least successful responses were characterised by drift away from the article, with writing about ideas that were not recognisable from the original.

The mark out of ten was given for evidence that the reading material had been understood. The reference in the Band 2 mark scheme to 'their own ideas are based on those of the original text(s)' allowed candidates to think for themselves but not to invent ideas that had no close connection or which were not tethered to the ideas in the article.

The following advice appeared in the report for June 2010 session and was equally relevant to the November session.

- 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.
- Preliminary discussions should focus on a discussion about how to approach the task. The content of the assignment should not be rehearsed.
- 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. Low marks must be given for mere repetition of the text or failure to engage with it.

Candidates should avoid texts that are:

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

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH

Paper 0500/05
Speaking and Listening

General comments

The test of speaking and listening skills is now well established at Centres. Many candidates who complete this component evidently prepare very well in advance, conduct appropriate research, and are clearly quite adept at making formal presentations.

Comments on specific aspects of the Test

Part 1 - Individual Task

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. In this session, a chosen approach was a dialogue – each candidate pretended to be two people, taking the roles of both the interviewer and the person being interviewed. This provided some entertaining Part 1 presentations.

Centres and candidates are of course free to focus on topics which lend themselves to standard presentations. However, it would be preferred that presentations utilised a greater range of presentational and language devices.

Part 2 - Discussion

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

On some occasions, it was felt that Examiners intervened a little too early, however, and should have allowed candidates to complete Part 1. Please remember that Part 1 can run to four and a half minutes and during this time, the candidate should be allowed to talk uninterrupted. Part 2 begins after the completion of the Part 1 presentation.

Choice of topics

There was an improvement in the choice of topics. In particular, there were more topics which had a particular focus or theme which lent itself to sustained and productive discussion. Good topics included: bee-keeping, censorship, scooters and the Japanese economy, eight types of intelligence, sailing, hypnosis, music as therapy, the seven sins, and magic. All of these allowed the candidate and the Examiner to engage in fruitful discussion.

The choice of topic does, of course, impact on the depth to which subsequent discussion can develop. A very general topic is unlikely to result in probing and lively discussion. Some examples of topics which would have benefited from a specific focus were: sport, the Internet, advertising, music, and travel.

Assessment

There was more accuracy this session in awarding marks for Part 1. In Part 2, Examiners generally placed candidates in the appropriate achievement band.

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

For Part 2, listening skills are assessed 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. For higher reward, the candidate would need to develop and extend the point being put forward and take a more prominent role in the conversation.

Advice to Centres

- A greater variety of approaches to Part 1 is encouraged.

Final comments

The amount of effort put in at many Centres by candidates and teachers in researching and presenting interesting and appropriate work is recognised.

CIE is grateful to have received samples on Compact Disc (CD) as this 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

All of the work presented for this session was appropriate and resulted in interesting speaking and listening activities which the candidates clearly enjoyed. It was evident that candidates and teachers worked together to design and implement a wide range of tasks which illustrated the candidates' speaking and listening skills fully.

It was pleasing to see the integration of literature into the folders – in many cases in an active manner, with candidates Role-playing characters from novels and plays in Task 2. Group work tended to be of the 'debate an issue' format and this worked well.

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 (paired) 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.