

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/11
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- followed instructions carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question
- read the introductions to the texts carefully
- understood the different requirements of the extended response questions
- paid attention to the guidance offered to help them focus their answers – for example, writing no more than 120 words in the summary and using just one example from the given text extract in **2(c)**
- considered the marks allocated to each question and developed their response accordingly
- avoided unselective copying and/or lifting from the text where appropriate
- worked with the ideas, opinions, and details in the text rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words where required
- planned the ideas to be used and the route through extended responses before writing, selecting only relevant material for each question
- avoided repetition
- checked and edited their responses to correct any careless errors, incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the reading paper and the requirements of each question. There were relatively few examples of misunderstanding in terms of task requirements and time-management was generally good with few candidates not attempting all questions.

Candidates seemed to find all three texts accessible, and the majority demonstrated engagement through their responses. Occasionally a failure to follow the rubric or complete a task fully limited opportunities to demonstrate understanding. This was most common in **Question 1(f)** where there was a failure to select only relevant ideas, in **Question 2(c)** where a candidate did not select a clear example from the text provided, or in **Question 2(d)** where some candidates offered three choices of language in total rather than three choices from each paragraph as specified in the task or selected long chunks of the language in the specified paragraphs rather than selecting words and phrases.

In **Question 1**, the most successful approach taken by candidates was to work through the tasks in the order presented paying careful attention to the number of marks allocated and the space provided for their responses as helpful indicators of how detailed their answers needed to be. They also referred carefully to the lines or paragraph specified in each question moving through the text as directed. Most candidates remembered to base their responses on evidence from the text to evidence their reading skills, but a few offered unsolicited opinion or comment that could not be rewarded. Less successful responses to **Question 1** tended to lack focus on the question. At times candidates used the language of the text where they had been asked to use own words – for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** by using the word 'quickly' to explain 'quick', or in **Question 1(e)** where they copied the explanations such as 'eat every last mouthful' instead of using their own words. This was sometimes an issue in **Question 1(f)** where some candidates copied phrases (or whole chunks of text) rather than remodelling the language of the text in their response.

In **Question 2** candidates were required to explain carefully selected words or phrases from the text. **Question 2(c)** supplied a short section of the text to select from as a preparation for the longer response in **Question 2(d)**. More successful answers were able to consider meanings in context and as well as the effects of the powerful language identified, demonstrating understanding of the writer's purpose in an overview. Middle-range answers tended to focus on the meanings of the language choices showing mostly clear understanding. Less successful responses struggled to develop viable explanations sometimes repeating the language of the text in the comments. These answers did not always choose appropriate language to discuss or only selected three examples in total.

In **Question 3** most responses addressed all three bullets in the question, although many candidates found it challenging to develop ideas for the third one. Most candidates wrote as Hua with the best responses developing a convincing voice and an enthusiastic and friendly tone for her letter to her father demonstrating understanding of the reflective element of the task. More successful responses used the ideas and details in the text selectively to work through the bullets logically. They were able to describe the inn and Hua's experiences with the guests on the first day of opening, developing her thoughts and feelings, as well as expressing her excitement about her future plans and improvements for her business by selecting a range of appropriate ideas and details from the text to develop. Responses in the middle range tended to use the text rather mechanically often writing narratively and paraphrasing closely rather than selecting ideas and details to use in their own writing to demonstrate understanding. Less successful responses tended to lack focus on the text covering only the main ideas and sometimes inventing material that lacked close tethering to the text. Some responses copied unselectively thus providing little evidence of understanding.

Paper 1 is primarily an assessment of Reading, however 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – 5 marks in **Question 1(f)** and 10 marks in **Question 3**. In these questions, candidates need to pay attention to the quality and accuracy of their writing to maximise their achievement. Candidates are advised to plan and review their responses to avoid inconsistencies of style and to correct errors that may impede communication.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Questions 1(a) – (e)

In response to Text A candidates were asked to answer a series of short answer questions. More successful responses paid careful attention to the command words in the instructions as well as the number of marks allocated to individual questions. These responses demonstrated sound understanding by selecting appropriate details and evidence from the text in concise, focused answers. Less successful responses tended to write too much or failed to follow the instruction to use own words. Some candidates offered several possible answers thus using time inefficiently and diluting evidence of understanding.

Question 1

(a) Who taught the narrator the recipe for making rice, according to the text?

In **Question 1(a)** candidates needed to state who taught the narrator the recipe for cooking rice. Most candidates were able to identify that it was the narrator's (her) father and very few candidates did not gain the mark for this question. Occasionally an answer was worded unclearly as 'the father's narrator' and therefore the mark was not awarded.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

- (i) 'sure and quick' (line 3):**
- (ii) 'tiny imperfections' (line 3):**

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were instructed to use their own words to evidence understanding of the phrases in the question. Where answers failed to achieve both marks available for each phrase it was usually due to the candidate's partial use of the words from the text. For example, in **Question 1(b)(i)** several candidates used the word 'surely' in their explanation of 'sure' thus not addressing the task or found it difficult to explain the meaning of 'sure' in this context offering vague explanations such as 'confident' or 'correct'. More successful responses were able to explain the

full phrase as used in the context of the text by demonstrating understanding of a precise and fast action or an action taken decisively and rapidly.

In **Question 1(b)(ii)** more candidates successfully explained the meaning of the whole phrase and gained both marks with many using phrases such as 'very little' or 'barely visible' to explain 'tiny' and 'flaws' or 'impurities' to explain 'imperfections'. Some candidates lifted 'pieces of dirt and sand' from line 3 which could not be credited in an own words question.

(c) Re-read paragraph 2 ('He swirled ... more than once.').

Give two reasons why the father's work in preparing the rice could have been time consuming.

To achieve both marks for this question candidates were required to offer two distinct reasons based on the father's actions when preparing the rice: the fact that some of the actions had to be repeated and that he was not reliant on measuring equipment or instructions instead doing everything through touch and feeling.

Most candidates were able to score both marks for selecting appropriate details such as his repeated rinsing or draining of the rice as well as the fact that he used his finger to measure the water level or that he didn't use a measuring jug or instructions. Where candidates failed to gain both marks, it was usually because they repeated the idea of repetition in both strands of their answer.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 ('I still dream ... say to the table.').

- (i) Identify main ways in which the father's appearance made him look out of place in his professional kitchen.**
- (ii) Explain why the speaker was embarrassed by her own attempts at making rice.**

To answer **Question 1(d)(i)** candidates needed to identify and select two pieces of evidence from paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 to demonstrate why the father's appearance made him look out of place in his professional kitchen. Correct responses focused on the old or faded / scruffy appearance of his clothing and the fact that he did not wear shoes when he cooked. A small number of candidates did not read this question carefully and misinterpreted what they were being asked to do. These candidates offered details to support the idea of the kitchen looking professional rather than details about the father's appearance.

In **Question 1(d)(ii)** many candidates were successful in gaining all three marks available by referring to her lack of skill (or messiness) in the motions of making the rice and the resulting texture being gruel-like and lumpy. Some candidates did not get the second or third mark because they referred too vaguely to the incorrect texture of the rice without offering the details needed. Some candidates may have missed the fact that this was a 3-mark question and therefore required three distinct points to be made.

(e) Re-read paragraph 6 ('In answer ... and my mother.').

Using your own words, explain how the father's actions while at the table could be seen as kind towards his daughter.

This question required candidates to show both explicit and implicit understanding from their reading of paragraph 6. Most candidates were able to achieve at least one mark, a good number gained two marks, but fewer gained all three. The most common reason for not gaining all three marks available was because of slightly vague answers: for example, referring to him eating the rice, but not specifically stating that he ate all of it or ate it very quickly. Several candidates also failed to stress that he ate the rice pretending that it was as good as his own or without complaining about its shortcomings. Some candidates lost marks in this question due to lifting from the text and ignoring the instruction to use own words in the response.

- (f) **According to Text B, why would a person choose a career in the hospitality industry?**
You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible.
Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

This question was based on Text B and required candidates to select relevant ideas from the text and organise them into a focused summary which addressed the task. Most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of the text and offer some relevant ideas to demonstrate understanding of why a person would choose a career in the hospitality industry. The most successful responses were carefully planned and coherent, focusing sharply on the task by referring to a wide range of ideas in the text. These responses were often preceded by a bullet-pointed plan in which ideas from the text were noted briefly before being included in a fluent own-words response.

Responses in the middle range tended to consider a more limited range of ideas, the most common being making a difference to someone's day, meeting new people and learning about other cultures, the variety of jobs available and job security. These responses often missed the more subtle points about job satisfaction, working overseas, easy opportunities for job relocation and the lack of a daily routine. Some less successful responses repeated the same ideas or included unnecessary examples such as long list of the different jobs available in the hospitality industry. Other candidates offered their responses to working in the hospitality industry which were not linked to the information in the text. Several candidates misunderstood the meaning of hospitality and wrote about working as a medical professional in a hospital instead. This approach usually demonstrated very superficial understanding of the text at best and inaccurate use of the ideas.

Length was often an indicator of the level of the response with some less successful responses being too short due to a limited number of points being offered and others very long and wordy due to the inclusion of unnecessary information and / or personal comments. The strongest responses tended to adhere to the advised length through adopting a concise and focused approach to the task. In most responses there was an attempt to use own words although some candidates did rely on lifting phrases from the text. This included some responses where there was evidence of selection and a range of ideas but also a failure to use own words which is an important aspect of summary writing. Examples of the most commonly lifted phrases were 'developed a passion for it', 'miserable at a regular desk job', 'you are in a position to make somebody's day', 'almost every country in the world has a hospitality industry', 'you will meet with travellers from all over the world', 'learn new things about different cultures every day' and 'not only in terms of the hours you work, but also the work you do in those hours'. Some very weak responses simply copied indiscriminately without any effort to select relevant ideas. There was also a tendency to include too much introductory information and / or irrelevant or general details about the hospitality industry.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f)

- re-read Text B after reading the question to identify potentially relevant ideas
- plan the response using brief notes to ensure a wide range of ideas from the text is selected
- avoid including unnecessary details which do not address the question
- avoid including examples
- organise the ideas, grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent
- avoid repeating ideas
- use your plan rather than the text as you write your answer to avoid lifting
- write clearly and make sure you express yourself fluently in your own words
- do not add comments or your own views
- try to keep to the guidance to 'write no more than 120 words'.

Question 2

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) Hua would be cooking the rice and the pak choi as late as possible.
- (ii) Hua knew that she was unable to give customers much choice in meal options.
- (iii) Hua hoped that people attending the local theatre would be regular customers.
- (iv) Mr and Mrs Kato were glued firmly to their seats.

The most successful answers to **Question 2(a)** focused on the underlined word or phrase, located the correct version in the text and gave it as the answer. Other responses copied the whole sentence from the question replacing the underlined phrase with the correct words from the text. This was an acceptable approach but unnecessary as it wasted examination time. Answers that used the text more widely than in the equivalent phrase / sentence could not be rewarded even if the correct word / phrase was included. Most candidates were familiar with the demands of this question, but a few seemed confused about how to respond offering own words equivalents of the underlined words instead of locating them in the text.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

Yes, this room was definitely on the list for modernisation. While the weather was warm, outdoor dining was preferable.

- (i) **definitely**
- (ii) **modernisation**
- (iii) **preferable**

In **Question 2(b)** the most successful answers considered the meaning of each word as it is used in the text. For example, the word 'modernisation' refers to the need to completely refurbish or renovate the dining room rather than simply decorate or buy new furniture. Most candidates were able to explain 'definitely' and 'preferable', but a significant number found 'modernisation' more challenging. Candidates should also be aware that only explanations in English can be rewarded: a number offered the Spanish word 'actualización' in response to **2(b)(ii)**.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the characters and feelings of either or both Mr and Mrs Kato.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

Mr and Mrs Kato, new arrivals, looked into the dining room. Both wore gentle smiles. Mrs Kato waved a delicate hand in the direction of the garden and a waft of expensive perfume floated towards Hua. Mr Kato lowered his eyes before informing Hua 'The colour of those bushes is divine. We saw them as we were parking. May we dine out there?'

In **Question 2(c)** candidates were required to select one example of language from the specified section of the text and explain how it suggested the characters and feeling of either both or one of Mr and Mrs Kato. Several candidates did not follow these instructions but instead offered a very general response with no clear language example selected. These responses tended to offer a general paraphrase of the whole section of text and could therefore not be rewarded as the question was not addressed. The most successful responses offered a concise quotation then considered what the writer suggested about either or both of the Katos through the language used. The most popular example was 'both had gentle smiles' and many responses explored the suggestion that they were kind and respectful to Hua as well as the idea that they were pleased to be at the inn and positive or happy about what they could see in the garden.

Other responses considered the example of 'a waft of expensive perfume floated towards Hua' and were able to explore ideas about Mrs Kato's sophistication, wealth, elegance and familiarity with luxuries. Many candidates were able to offer convincing explanations of 'waved a delicate hand' and show full understanding of the writer's suggestion that Mrs Kato is someone used to having what she desires, her assumption that her husband will understand her wishes and her elegance. Some less successful responses tried to do too much, selecting several examples, or selected an

inappropriate example which used plain language such as 'We saw them as we were parking'. Only one example could be rewarded so offering more was a waste of valuable examination time that could have been spent on **Question 2(d)** where more developed responses are required to target higher marks.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 3 and 5.

- **Paragraph 3 begins 'The garden, enhanced ...' and is about the pleasure Hua takes in the inn's Japanese garden.**
- **Paragraph 5 begins 'Just before 7.30 ...' and is about the dining room at the inn.**
- **Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.**

The most successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of three appropriate language choices from each of the two paragraphs indicated in the question. The most successful approach was to consider the meanings of carefully chosen phrases in the context of the text and then consider the effect in terms of connotations and the atmosphere or attitudes created by the writer's language choices. These responses often offered a clear overview of the writer's intentions in each paragraph. Less successful responses were sometimes written in note form and offered less developed analysis or repeated the same general ideas about effects, often making rather vague assertions rather than considering specific words more closely. Middle range responses were usually more successful when explaining meanings but struggled to explore the effects, and the weakest responses tended to offer quotations (sometimes rather unselectively) but often did not find anything relevant to say about them. Some candidates chose three language choices in total rather than three from each paragraph as clearly stated in the question (although this was less common than in previous examination sessions). This led to some under-developed responses to this question.

The strongest responses selected phrases but also considered the individual words within them suggesting how they worked within the context of the whole language choice. Rather than identifying literary devices they engaged fully with the language, considering its impact and connotations fully and linking each choice to a coherent and developed consideration of the paragraph. In paragraph 3 many were able to explore their individual choices within the context of the elegantly designed, idyllic and tranquil Japanese style garden that Hua takes great pride in. They considered phrases such as 'enhanced by gentle sunlight playing', 'resplendent', and 'comfortable contours of crimson for the eye to follow' as representing the delicate beauty of the garden, the richness of the colours in the foliage, and the attractiveness of the careful designs to the human eye, as well as the calming and peaceful nature of the environment created. They could successfully develop these ideas through other phrases such as 'jaunty maple trees' and also 'fat squatting rhododendron bushes' as the inclusion of different styles and shapes to offer variety, or the 'tempting maze of stone paths', 'delicately limbed arched bridge' and 'curled like a half moon' to show the fragile and exquisite nature of the designs and the perfect shapes used to attract and enchant guests and offer a scene that is magical or like something from a fairytale. These choices could all be linked successfully yet considered independently.

In paragraph 5 many responses were able to draw an obvious contrast citing the dull and hostile presentation of the dining room. The word 'problematic' was often used as a good opening choice to this part of the response as indicating that the dining room poses an issue for Hua and is something that needs to be carefully worked out and addressed. Phrases such as 'imposing dark oak tables' and 'narrow tunnels' enabled candidates to consider the unappealing and impractical furniture in the room leading to an oppressive and heavy atmosphere. Phrases such as 'heavily embossed ancient red wallpaper' and 'sneered cruelly' also contributed to the sense of hostility caused by the austere and old-fashioned decorations as if the room itself is unwelcoming to the guests. Some candidates were also able to analyse the effect of the clock 'ticking in ponderous reminder of its venerable status' by alluding to its sound as persistent, annoying and dominating the space or acting as a reminder to Hua of the amount of work needing to be done.

There was generally little evidence of misreading in the two paragraphs specified in the question, but some candidates found it challenging to move beyond the general beauty of the garden in paragraph 3 and/or explored the mistaken idea that the dining room was messy or chaotic in paragraph 5. They tended to repeat these general ideas for every language choice selected.

sometimes using the wording of the text in their explanations. Some less successful responses also included very long quotations with general explanations rather than engaging closely with specific words. Very rarely no quotations were included, with a brief description of the paragraphs offered instead. Such responses did not address the question at all.

Candidates are reminded that it is the quality of their language analysis which attracts marks. Listing of literary devices or the selection of plain language from the text is unlikely to lead to a successful response. Many candidates simply identified literary devices offering vague explanations such as 'it creates a strong image' with no attempt to look at the words themselves. In this question candidates should focus carefully on words used in an interesting or unusual way: for example, rather than simply focusing on 'gentle sunlight' to explain that it emitted a soft warmth, adding the word 'playing' to the language choice allows a much more developed exploration of the language through considering the innocence, charm and idyllic nature of the scene. Candidates need to exercise care when selecting their language choices to include carefully chosen words to maximise their opportunities for developed discussion.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- select precise and accurate language choices from the specified paragraphs
- make sure explanations of meanings make sense within the context of the text – avoid literal meanings unless this is the case
- avoid very general explanations such as 'this creates a strong visual image', this makes us want to read on' or 'this makes the reader feel part of the story'
- try to engage with the language at word level by considering connotations/associations of words and why the writer has selected them
- for each choice start with the contextualized meaning then move on to the effect created by the language in terms of how it helps our understanding of the events, characters, atmosphere, etc.

Question 3

You are Hua, the owner of the inn. The next day you write a letter to your father back home telling him about your new business venture. In your letter you should:

- **describe the inn and what you think will appeal to guests**
- **describe the guests that you met on the first day and what you felt about them**
- **explain what plans you have for developing the business in the future and how you hope to accomplish these plans?**

This question required candidates to write a letter from Hua to her father telling him all about the opening of her new business, the inn. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their letter. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and develop the ideas to express Hua's thoughts and feelings about the inn and the guests' experiences on its opening day; the third bullet required candidates to infer what plans Hua may have to improve and develop the inn in the future using ideas and clues in the text to inspire and support the inferences.

Most candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Many of the responses were also able to develop the ideas by creating a convincing voice for Hua and interpreting the events from her perspective, evaluating the ideas and adapting them accordingly. Where candidates had followed the bullets carefully, they were often able to develop explicit and implicit ideas effectively to include convincing articulation of Hua's feelings about her new business venture and her experiences with the first guests on the opening day as well as her plans for the future of the inn. Many dealt with the confusion over the Dreyfuss' overheard conversation very successfully linking it to plans to increase security in the third bullet point. Less successful responses tended to track the text often paraphrasing it closely and therefore lacking development of Hua's perspective on the events. The least successful responses used the ideas in the text thinly, sometimes misreading some of the details such as the Katos' shock on hearing the Dreyfuss couple discussing stealing an expensive car. These responses often assumed the Katos were literally stuck in their seats but offered no explanation of how that may have happened.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to describe Hua's feelings about the new inn and explain what she felt would appeal most to her guests. This offered opportunities to look at the inn's Japanese theme including the carefully designed and exquisite gardens, the traditional and freshly cooked food on offer, the option to book rooms overnight, the option of eating in the garden, and the setting of the inn near the river

and newly opened theatre. The most successful approach to this bullet was one where candidates extracted the relevant details and developed them by expressing Hua's own feelings and hopes for her guests' enjoyment of the facilities provided. These responses tended to adopt a positive and enthusiastic tone suitable for a daughter excitedly sharing her achievements with her father. Many cited the desire to share their Japanese culture through the food her father had taught her to cook. In responses where candidates just repeated ideas from the text without communicating Hua's enthusiasm they tended to be rather mechanical (or even thin and general) hence the more subtle developments were often missed. There was little evidence of misreading in response to the first bullet, but some responses didn't consider many aspects of the inn focusing almost solely on the garden and food. Sometimes there was confusion about Hua's attitude to the dining room with some responses mistakenly indicating that she had chosen the red wallpaper and oak tables herself and liked the design.

The second bullet offered many opportunities to explore Hua's impressions of and feelings about the first guests to visit the inn. The best responses picked up on the more subtle details such as other guests already exploring the garden before the Katos' arrival and Hua's pleasure when seeing them through the kitchen window. These responses also looked at the two named couples in detail noticing the subtle differences between them and exploring Hua's impressions in detail. These responses were often more positive towards Mr and Mrs Kato admiring their elegance and understated appreciation of the finer things in life as well as pondering about their relative wealth and expressing initial hope they would become regular customers in the future. Mr and Mrs Dreyfuss were often perceived to be rather brash in comparison although some candidates thought that Mrs Dreyfuss redeemed herself when she booked the table for dinner so politely. The confusion over the play rehearsal and the Katos' mistaken assumption that their car was about to be stolen were often handled very well with expressions of Hua's regret at the confusion and their untimely departure evident.

Other successful responses decided that the Mr and Mrs Dreyfuss did in fact steal the car with her appearance in reception acting as a double-bluff and were able to support this sufficiently for it to be an acceptable development of the events and ideas in the text. Less successful responses focused only on describing the couples using the language of the text or very close paraphrasing and avoided offering any interpretation of the events leading to the misunderstanding. Some less successful responses didn't name the couples or attempt to differentiate much between them. A few responses misinterpreted the events and thought that Mr and Mrs Dreyfuss had glued Mr and Mrs Kato to their seats in the garden despite there being no evidence in the text to suggest this was a possibility. Other responses claimed that Hua had built a theatre in the ground of the inn for the guests or confused the stream and the river. Close reading of the text is required to provide evidence of more than reasonable or general understanding.

When responding to bullet 3 the most successful responses focused on the evidence in the text such as the need for a wider menu than Hua could currently offer, and the requirement for more staff to manage the food, guests and accommodation to take the pressure off Hua and Tania. The best responses also considered the problems caused by the outdated dining room in terms of practicality due to the large furniture causing lack of space for the waitress service, but also the aesthetic considerations in terms of the dark and oppressive atmosphere. Many candidates linked this to the perfection of the garden and indicated that the dining room needed to be lighter to offer a pleasing alternative in less warm weather when dining in the garden may not be practical.

Other developments included ideas about increasing security around the carpark and possibly using advertising to attract more guests, particularly related to the theatre performances. Less successful responses often added new material without any tethering to the ideas in the text. These included plans for spas and swimming pools or children's play areas. Many suggested opening inns in other parts of the country or around the world.

Candidates seemed comfortable and familiar with the format of a letter to a relative with most adopting an appropriate tone and style. The less successful responses tended to be too narrative as they relied too heavily on the sequencing of the original text and did not offer reflections and interpretations to adapt the material to indicate what Hua would be likely to share with her father. The language used was mostly appropriate and some more successful responses created a wholly convincing voice as Hua confiding in her father and wanting him to be proud of her achievements as well as offer her advice and support for the future. In less successful responses the language and voice were rather plain but rarely inappropriate for the character.

Generally, accuracy was good with some skilfully written responses. Others struggled to maintain fluency resulting in some awkward expression caused by errors in grammar and punctuation. Candidates are advised to check through their work carefully to correct errors where possible.

There were few instances of wholesale lifting from the passage, but some candidates were over-reliant on lifted phrases and sentences. Some of the most commonly lifted phrases were the descriptions of the cooked food, 'enhanced by gentle sunlight', 'jaunty maple trees and fat squatting rhododendron bushes', 'comfortable contours of crimson', 'problematic dining room,' 'newly built theatre', 'both wore gentle smiles', 'waft of expensive perfume', the direct speech in various parts of the text, 'dramatic introduction of his wife', 'stuck rigidly to their chairs', and 'an expensive car that was departing quickly from the inn car park'. Candidates should be aware that use of own words is necessary both to show reading understanding and to access writing marks in the higher levels.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read Text C carefully, more than once, to ensure sound understanding
- pay careful attention to the perspective required for the task – for example, the voice being created and whether you are looking back at the events
- keep the audience and purpose firmly in mind
- do not invent information and material that is not clearly linked to the details and events in the text
- give equal attention to all three bullet points
- briefly plan your response to ensure that you are selecting ideas relevant to all three bullets
- avoid copying from the text: use your own words as far as possible
- remember to use ideas and details from the text but to adapt and develop them appropriately to create a convincing voice and new perspective
- leave some time to check through your response
- do not waste time counting the words: the suggested word length is a guide, not a limit.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/12
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the three texts and questions in the order set, attempting all parts of all questions
- had planned their responses for higher tariff tasks in advance of writing – keeping the focus of the question in mind when selecting ideas and deciding on a logical route through their answer
- after reading questions, returned to the text to check their understanding of key details and ideas
- followed task instructions and references carefully to base their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- focused on the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each of the three extended response questions
- considered the marks and space allocated to each question, targeting their response time accordingly
- paid attention to the specific guidance offered in tasks – for example, indicating clearly the one example from the text extract they were using in **2(c)** and identifying just the correct word/phrase in each part of **2(a)**
- developed relevant ideas, opinions and details from the text in the response to reading task rather than inventing untethered material
- used their own words where instructed to do so, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- avoided repetition
- checked and edited their responses to correct any incomplete ideas or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the Reading paper and general understanding of the demands of the three tasks, though there were still some candidates who did not pay attention to the guidance in the task instructions and missed opportunities to evidence skills and understanding as a consequence. Instances where whole tasks had not been attempted were very rare, though there were occasions where responses to part questions were incomplete or missing, limiting opportunities to target higher marks.

Responses to the tasks indicated that candidates found the three texts equally accessible and engaging. Occasionally, a loss of focus on the rubric and/or details of a question as set limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered in the answer. For example, a few candidates attempted to choose and explain more than one example in **2(c)** and/or tried to offer explanations in their own words for **2(a)** rather than select from the text. Similarly, on occasion there were some less well-focused responses to higher tariff tasks from candidates who had scored well in smaller sub questions. For example, some candidates introduced excess, writing far more than the maximum of 120 words advised, for the selective summary **Question 1(f)** and/or framed their answer as advice, others did not address all three bullets in **Question 3**, or discussed choices from one paragraph only in **Question 2(d)**.

In **Question 1**, candidates scoring highly had worked through the tasks in the order presented and usually made efficient use of their time. The best answers paid attention in **Questions 1 (a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response, providing clear, unambiguous responses. They did not add further unnecessary material and focused on answering each question as set. Most candidates followed the line or paragraph references in the questions carefully to help them to move down **Text A** in order and to direct their attention. Almost all remembered that

in a test of comprehension their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from the text to evidence their Reading skills, not drawn from personal opinion or experience.

Less successful responses sometimes offered circular answers, repeating the language of the question where own words had been specified as being required; such responses provided insufficient evidence of understanding as a consequence – for example, in **1(b)(i)** suggesting that ‘this means happiness that has no complications’. In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on copying whole sections of text and/or repeating the language of the text, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding as a result. A small number of candidates attempted unwisely to answer this summary task by offering and explaining quotations from the passage.

In **Question 2** candidates needed first to identify **(2(a))** and explain **(2(b))** words and phrases from **Text C, The dancer**, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via one example from the extract in **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. More successful answers were careful to refer to the text to locate specific relevant choices and consider meaning in context. Opportunities for marks were missed by those candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify one example from the text extract to explain and in **Question 2(a)** by some who copied out whole sentences from the text rather than identifying the exact word/phrase that matched the precise sense of just the underlined word/phrase in the question. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they explore and explain the meaning of each of the words they have chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects. Most were able to suggest six potentially useful examples for analysis - three in each half - for the **2(d)** task and offer basic effect or meaning in context, though several candidates were not sufficiently clear, careful or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less successful responses, repetition of the language of the text, misreading of detail or simple labelling of devices (without explanation of how these were working) meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. A small number of candidates offered few or no choices in **Question 2(d)**.

In **Question 3** most candidates’ responses attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task, though a few lost sight of the text or task – for example, writing creatively about their own experience of dance/school and/or their own parents’ expectations (ideas which were not relevant in this response to Reading task). Most candidates had remembered to write from Veda’s perspective, with the best focused on interpreting the evidence in the text throughout, though not all remembered that Veda was writing to both of her parents. Responses across the cohort covered a wide range of levels of achievement, with mid-range responses often missing opportunities because of uneven focus and /or presenting a narrow range of ideas from the text. Less successful responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with very little modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided.

Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, though 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity and register of their writing. It is advisable to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, serious errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that unclear writing is likely to limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. Leaving sufficient time to edit and correct responses is advisable.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1 (a) – (e)

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to **Text A, Why dance?**. More successful responses had paid careful attention to the command words and paragraph references in the task instructions to demonstrate effectively and efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example by offering overlong, unclear or ambiguous explanations, striving to offer own word answers where these were not needed and/or repeating language of the text where own words were required. Candidates should note that where use of own words is necessary to evidence understanding task guidance specifies that. Less well focused answers on occasion negated evidence of understanding by including additional incorrect material and/or extra guesses and irrelevant material – an inefficient use of examination time.

The most successful responses provided evidence that candidates had understood the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions to show what they could do and understand. They followed the order of the sub questions to work through the text from the beginning and were careful not to introduce ideas outside or in contradiction to those suggested by the text.

- (a) Give **two** pieces of evidence that humans possess an urge to dance, according to the text.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates had taken their cue from the question and successfully identified paragraph 1 of the text as containing the evidence of humans 'urge to dance'. A small number of candidates offered only one piece of evidence and/or overlooked key elements of the evidence as offered – for example, citing pictures in general rather than specifically pictures of dancers on cave walls. Some candidates made use of the question stem to help focus their answer, whilst others simply wrote the key words of their answer alongside each bullet in the response area – either approach was acceptable.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the text means by:**

- (i) 'uncomplicated happiness' (line 6):
(ii) 'pent-up emotions' (line 7):

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks it was sometimes the result of having explained just one aspect of the phrase, for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** attempting to explain 'pent-up' only and repeating the word 'emotions'. More effective answers were able to indicate that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of the question in the context of the text – for example, in **1b(i)** that 'uncomplicated happiness' meant the pure or simple joy experienced by many people when dancing. A small number of candidates offered no evidence of understanding by simply repeating the words of the question and/or did not pay careful attention to the words in context – for example proposing in **1b(i)** that it meant dance was not complicated and would make you happy.

- (c) **Re-read paragraph ('Experiments have proved ... went up.').**
Give two reasons why dancing is better for you than sitting quietly or cycling on an exercise bike.

In **Question 1(c)** most candidates were able to identify two distinct reasons why dancing is better for you than sitting quietly or cycling on an exercise bike according to paragraph 3 of the text – that it improves problem-solving skills and mood levels. A few candidates had not read closely and based their answer incorrectly on paragraph 4 and/or 5.

- (d) **Re-read paragraphs 5 and 6 ('Another big draw ... those who don't.').**
(i) **Identify two reasons why people are drawn to dancing.**
(ii) **Explain why even an untrained dancer might be persuaded to dance.**

When deciding on their answers for **parts 1(d)(i)** and **1(d)(ii)** a number of candidates identified attractions of dance that might both draw people in general to it and persuade even those who were untrained and could be credited for that. For example, many saw the fact that dance was fun as being relevant both generally and specifically. Others were equally successfully in offering just the ideas they considered most relevant to untrained dancers in **part (ii)** and the more general points in **part (i)**. Candidates who were less focused on the details of the task sometimes missed opportunities to target full marks – for example, by attempting to base their answer all/in part on paragraph 3 or by miscopying to suggest incorrectly that dance was 'not for those of a certain age or ability'..

- (e) **Re-read paragraph 7 ('These factors compensate ... unnecessarily early.').**
Using your own words, explain why some people might not want to take up dancing as a career.

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations showed that candidates were able to derive three distinct reasons of the four available in the specified paragraph. Candidates who recast the relevant information using their own words as instructed were best able to demonstrate that they had teased out and understood the implied reasons why some people might not want to take up dance as a career, with many offering all four ideas succinctly.

- (f) **According to Text B, what prevents students from wanting to attend dance classes? You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.**

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from **Text B** and some understanding of the requirements of the task. However, there were examples of copying and lifting which diluted evidence of skills and understanding in answers. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea, inclusion of advice to teachers of how to address students' concerns and/or misreading of details meant opportunities were missed by many candidates to target higher marks.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep their explanations concise. Many had recognised the opportunity to demonstrate their writing skills by adapting the more informal and persuasive style of the original text to a more formal style suitable for a written summary when presenting an objective overview of the factors preventing students from wanting to attend. Less assured responses had often missed this chance – for example echoing the text with reference to other students 'hanging around' and 'this "we" business'. Some mid-range answers did not immediately direct their response towards the focus of the task, offering redundant advice to teachers of how to prevent these problems.

Overview was evidenced in some of the most successful answers where relevant ideas had been carefully selected from different parts of the text and then re-organised efficiently for their reader. Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in significant excess through redundancy and repetition. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

The strongest responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that focused specifically and exclusively on reasons for not wanting to take part in dance classes as presented by Text B, demonstrating both concision and precise understanding of a wide range of relevant ideas. Some answers at the top end charted potential problems chronologically from a potential dancer's perspective – starting with the first impressions gained from website through to the experience in class and the audience of students appearing at the end of the lesson just when they were feeling hot, tired and sweaty.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing or blurring the original idea and to organise points helpfully for their reader. On occasion, candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task and significant excess arose because of lengthy explanation. Some candidates continued to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others adhered to the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain only a handful of ideas. Candidates producing effective answers were able to demonstrate that they had understood a wider range of relevant ideas, communicating these accurately and concisely in their own words.

Most candidates showed at least some awareness of the need to avoid excess, though not all were able to select ideas efficiently to navigate around more obviously redundant material – for example, the additional detail around the scheduling of dance classes and experience of feeling watched by other students. A significant proportion of students gave lengthy descriptions of the timetable order and its effects before eventually moving on to mention other more relevant points, not having recognised that much of the information around the timetable and the lesson crossover was repeated.

Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text in the order it was presented. Many of these answers simply tracked through and replayed the text, substituting occasional own words – an approach that diluted evidence that the text and/or task had been understood. Many of these least effective responses also tended to have misread key details in the text – for example, some suggested that large rooms (classes) were a problem, or that students would be tired at 8pm in the evening as it was very late for a lesson.

Length was sometimes an indicator of the relative success of a response. Some responses were far too short with only a small number of relevant ideas identified, and others very long and wordy due to the inclusion of unnecessary information, comments or quotations. The least effective responses were overly reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text and splicing them together is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f):

- after reading the task instructions, re-read the text to identify only those potentially relevant ideas you can use in your answer
- identify and discard any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question – for example, where a question asks you to focus only on ‘what prevents’, you should not include advice on how to counter or deal with these issues
- reflect on the ideas you have highlighted in your plan, checking that they are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which might need further explanation
- return to the text to ‘sense check’ any ideas you are unsure of before you try to use them
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- organise and sequence your ideas to make them clear to your reader – do not rely on repeating ideas in the order of the original text
- explain ideas in a way that someone who had not read the text themselves would understand
- write informatively and accurately in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage
- check back to ensure that you have included all the ideas you planned to
- though it is not necessary to count every word, you should keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim for concision.

Question 2

(a) Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:

- (i) Grandma thinks that she shouldn’t cause trouble between her son and daughter-in-law.
- (ii) Veda’s mother starts to talk seriously.
- (iii) Veda’s plans for a future career are not ones that her mother considers worthy.
- (iv) At school Veda used to try very hard but found it difficult.

Focused responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified in each part the correct word or phrase from Text C to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example – simply and efficiently just giving the word or phrase as their answer. Other responses added unnecessary time pressure by copying out the entire sentence in each case, substituting the word or phrase and then bracketing or underlining their answer. Marks were sometimes missed where answers were incomplete (for example, giving ‘lecture’ without ‘launches into a’ and so not covering the full sense of the underlined phrase). Others lacked focus (for example, copying out whole sentences or including extra words or longer sections of text that went beyond the sense of the underlined word(s)) – for example, including ‘her place’ in their answer to **part (i)**.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the writer means by the words underlined:

- (i) dreamt
- (ii) compulsion
- (iii) excel

In **Question 2(b)**, successful answers had carefully considered the precise meaning in context of each of the words underlined. Less successful responses simply repeated/reflected the word in their explanation – for example, ‘excel means she was excellent’ – or did not offer sufficiently precise explanation for understanding of the individual word specified to be credited – for example, ‘good at’ on its own suggested none of the extraordinary level talent/skill indicated by the word ‘excel’.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the dance teacher's happiness at Veda's performance.**

My dance teacher's stick clatters heavily to the floor. He claps spontaneously. 'Perform like that and you're sure to win.' I can see tears brimming like dew-drops in his eyes.

In **Question 2(c)**, where candidates had focused clearly on using just one carefully selected example taken from the text extract they were best placed to demonstrate their understanding – usually beginning with an explanation of meaning in context, ahead of going on to explain what that suggested in relation to the writer's feelings. Those making efficient use of time often identified their example, by underlining it in the text of the question or used it as a subheading for their answer. Successful responses often centred around the image of 'tear drops brimming like dew-drops in [the teacher's] eyes' suggesting something of the beauty/natural reaction in his overwhelming pride. Other strong responses focused on how the teacher clapped 'spontaneously' explaining the effect of the instinctive and impulsive show of appreciation as indicating an honest and heart-felt reaction. Several candidates however appeared to have selected 'claps spontaneously' without understanding the meaning of spontaneously – offering incorrect suggestions for meaning such as 'loudly' or 'went on for a long time.'

Most successful responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less successful responses often attempted to discuss more than one example – time that might have been more profitably spent in **Question 2(d)** where there were up to 15 marks available and more opportunities for relevant development of explanations. Some less successful responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted unwisely to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms. On occasion, opportunities were missed due to a lack of focus on the task or text – for example, a few candidates assumed incorrectly that it was Veda who was crying and/or simply repeated the wording of the question asserting that their chosen example 'showed happiness' without suggesting how.

- (d) **Re-read paragraphs 9 and 12.**

- **Paragraph 9 begins 'I think back ...' and is about Veda's memories of what her grandmother**
- **said about the early evidence of her dancing ability.**
- **Paragraph 12 begins 'I leap and land ...' and is about Veda practising for her dance**
- **competition while her teacher taps the beat.**

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

Successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of six relevant selections – three from each paragraph – often starting by explaining literal meaning in context and then moving on to consider effect (for example, discussing connotations and suggesting the impacts created by the writer's language choices). Such responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language in each case through detailed discussion of focused choices. Where candidates considered all the key words in slightly longer choices they were able to avoid those more generalised comments of less effective responses. Candidates relying on repeating the language of the text within their explanation were less well placed to demonstrate understanding fully and often offered only partially effective or very thin explanation as a result. The strongest responses considered all the key words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and / or in the context of the description as a whole. Rather than selecting the most 'obvious' literary devices, successful responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain. Some of the strongest responses explored how their judiciously selected choices worked both individually and together to influence the reader's impression, building to an overview. Responses at level 5 frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing images, for example in relation to Veda 'chasing down soaring music' and 'catching and pinning rhythms'. A small number of candidates selected only three choices in total over the whole question and limited their achievement as a consequence.

When dealing with paragraph 9, many answers had identified either ‘restricting bars’ and/or ‘prison-line cot’ as potentially interesting examples to discuss, with most able to offer at least a basic explanation of the younger Veda’s frustration at being constrained, though not all took the opportunity to target higher marks by finding their own words to explain ‘her desire for freedom’, often relying instead on recycling the words of the passage to describe how she ‘urgently craved release’. Some mid-range answers offered more careful selection and explanation in one half of the answer than the other – failing to target higher levels by repeating words such as ‘fast’ and ‘challenging’ when discussing paragraph 12 rather than finding synonyms to evidence understanding of meaning. Some candidates who wrote more general comments around the feelings of happiness Veda experienced when dancing missed opportunities to consider the distinct meanings of each word in ‘fills me with elation’ and ‘excitement mounting’ which might have resulted in higher marks. Many candidates offered basic effects – for example, suggesting that ‘lotus buds blossoming’ suggested the beauty of Veda’s movements, whilst those offering evidence of understanding at higher levels were often able to go on to consider how the image of a bud opening to a flower might add to the sense of her natural talent.

Some candidates had misread details of the text or were unsure of the basic meaning of the words they had selected and their explanations were limited as a result – for example, some had not understood that ‘heave’ described an action by Veda and implied a degree of effort or difficulty, suggesting incorrectly instead that it meant Veda used to ‘lean against’, ‘hang on’ or ‘have’ bars on her cot. The least successful answers to **Question 2(d)** offered inappropriate, generic comments such as ‘The writer uses images that help us imagine what it was like for Veda.’ – such comments are unlikely to be a useful starting point for discussion of how language is working in the extract and can often create a false sense of security, meaning candidates move on without saying anything more concrete to evidence their understanding. Satisfactory responses offered a clear explanation of the literal meaning of each word within the example they had chosen, whilst more successful answers reached for more precise vocabulary and in doing so touched on effect. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of what you could ‘see/hear happening’ in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect.

In **Question 2(d)**, answers which simply list literary devices used and / or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. It is the quality of the analysis which attracts marks in a language question. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Long quotations with only the first and last words identified are less likely to be useful and often result in very thin general comments at best. On occasion, opportunities were missed in answers where choices had been selected from one paragraph only. Some of the least successful answers to **Question 2(d)** appeared to have been answered last and were very brief, generalised and/or incomplete. The most successful answers were often able to explore and discuss their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, ahead of arriving at an understanding of how and why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that the quotations you select from the text are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- in each part of 2(a) make sure that your selection from the text is clearly identified – remember you are looking for a word or phrase, not a whole sentence
- in 2(b) be careful not to include extra incorrect guesses that might detract from the evidence that you understand the meaning of the word you are explaining
- in 2(c) clearly identify the one example from the text excerpt you are going to explain
- in 2(d), choose 3 examples from each of the two specified paragraphs (6 choices in total)
- where you are trying to explain meaning check that your explanation makes sense
- when explaining how language is working avoid empty comments such as saying that ‘the writer helps us to imagine the scene’ – you need to say how your chosen example does this to show understanding
- make sure your explanations deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- when you are trying to suggest effect and are unsure, start by explaining the precise meaning in context of the word(s) in the choice
- when you are trying to explore and explain images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create

- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to add in further detail and/or correct errors to help show you have read carefully and understood.

Question 3

You are Veda. It is a few months later and you have started studying at your new dance school. You write a letter home to your parents, reflecting on your past experiences.

In your letter you should explain:

- **why dancing has always been so important in your life**
- **how the adults in your life felt about your dancing and how this made you feel**
- **your thoughts now about the conversation you had with your parents after you won the competition.**

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with **Text C**, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to think their way into Veda's perspective once she has started her new dance school and is looking back on the events details and/or suggested in the text. A few candidates who appeared unwisely to have left **Question 2** until last indicated some initial misreading of timescales and details in their answer to **Question 3** – for example referencing the teacher described in the passage as Veda's current dance teacher and/or confusing the conversation with her parents before the competition (outlined in the text) with the conversation they were invited to imagine using cues in the narrative once she knew she had won.

Almost all candidates chose to address the bullets in the order set, though some wrote convincingly starting with Veda's thoughts now about the conversation, reflecting on the attitude of her family members and her teacher, before explaining the importance of dance in her life and coming back round to the present. Most kept in mind the advice to 'reflect on her past experiences' not simply repeat them and avoided introducing untethered ideas in relation to what might be happening in her new dance school.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to revisit details in the text related to the importance of dance in Veda's life and most candidates were able to offer several relevant ideas, with answers aiming at higher marks taking up the invitation in the question to reflect and as a consequence extend and develop ideas from the text. Almost all mentioned more straightforward explicit ideas – for example, referencing Grandma's stories about Veda learning to move before she learned to talk and Veda's evident enjoyment / sense of fulfilment when performing. Many identified Veda's ambition to be a professional dancer / dance as her career – often also touching on her mother's preference for her to take another, more 'respectable' career route with the best answers often using this as a natural link into the reactions of other adults in Veda's life (bullet 2) and generally it was bullet one which was answered most securely at all levels. There was some copying that resulted in less successful responses forgetting they were meant to be addressing Veda's parents, not just writing about them. There was also some unhelpful lifting from the earlier texts – for example, 'Dance was important to Veda because it improved her problem-solving skills' or 'enabled her to jig at weddings'.

Many answers to bullet two missed opportunities by only commenting on Veda's mother's view as if it were the view of both parents – the text offered details to suggest that Pa's opinion might differ. More successful answers offered evidence that they had read more closely, for example by commenting on the father's sense of being caught in the middle and were often then well placed to develop these ideas for bullet three in relation to Pa's role in the imagined conversation following the news of Veda's competition success. Other answers missed opportunities by overlooking Grandma's attitude as distinct from that of Veda's parents, whereas those offering more successful responses recognised that Grandma's support and understanding not only played a role in encouraging Veda but also pre-empted the imagined conversation for bullet three since she 'had been talking to Pa'. Some comprehensive answers also included reference to the judges and to Veda's dance teacher – often developing the contrast in their enthusiastic and positive reactions to Veda's talent to that of her mother/parents.

When developing the conversation referred to at the end of the text for bullet three, most versions of Veda were understanding of her mother's ambitions and attitude – recognising the inference in the text that however unfair the reaction might seem on the surface, Ma was not a monster. Some developed the idea of gratitude / recognition that her mother would relent since she wanted the best for Veda – for example citing that Veda had not been prevented from attending dance lessons and Grandma saw hope she would be persuaded once it was clear Veda could expect success. Those who had taken time to reflect on Pa's perspective separately in bullet two, were often now able to extend the idea that he might now (finally) decide

to intervene, having been petitioned by Grandma on Veda's behalf. Many picked up on the suggestion that Veda would have 'answer(ed) questions sensibly and explain(ed) herself', persuading her parents that this was the right thing to do. Where candidates decided that Ma's anger as described earlier would never let her agree, they could still be credited though those who suggested Ma still refused to let Veda go and prevented her from doing so showed signs of misreading since the question was clear that Veda was now attending the dance school.

The third bullet was often the least well covered in mid-range and lower answers with many missing Grandma's excitement and the fact that Veda was making an effort to answer sensibly – both of which ideas were clear in the text. In the weakest responses, ideas relevant to bullet three were often not included and replaced by more general signings off or speculation of the fame and extreme fortunes Veda might gain as a dancer – at odds with the suggestions in the text – limiting the evidence of skills and understanding as a consequence. A few attempted to address bullet three by referencing the earlier conversation ahead of the competition, others speculated at length about life in the new dance school, inventing new characters, facilities and events not suggested by **Text C** and/or referring to how to improve a dance school (based on advice in **Text B**) or the benefits of dancing socially/cognitively (attempting to use material from **Text A**).

On occasion, having returned to the text to find useful details in Text C, some candidates then undermined their own efforts by reading less carefully than they needed to – for example, suggesting that Veda's teacher worked at her new dance school or that her parents kept her prisoner in her cot as a child, refusing to allow her to attend dance lessons. Meanwhile other candidates provided far more secure evidence of their skills and understanding, often showing evidence that during planning they had apparently made effective use of strategies such as simple diagrams to clearly establish the relationships between events and/or personas, and the evidence/details they could use to predict the 'conversation' for bullet three.

For the most part, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a letter to parents, and many were able to use an appropriate register and draw on a range of suitable vocabulary to express their ideas. Where candidates relied too heavily on the structure and/or language of the original text to communicate, expression often became awkward and/or lost clarity. Many answers would have benefitted from a read back through/some basic editing to ensure that meaning was clear throughout in order to offer more secure evidence of their Writing and Reading skills. The best answers were often polite and measured – echoing the reflective perspective suggested by the question – and maintained the role and voice of Veda addressing her parents until the end. The least successful responses to **Question 3** copied sections of text with minimal modification and rarely addressed bullets two and/or three adequately, often signing off in their own name rather than Veda's.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- remember to base your answer on the ideas and details you find in Text C only
- keep the audience and purpose for your response in mind throughout your answer
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- look for the clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and situations
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points
- do not copy directly from the text: use your own words as far as you can to express ideas
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- leave sufficient time to edit and correct your response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/13
Reading

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- worked through the three texts and questions in the order set, attempting all parts of all questions
- after reading questions, returned to the text to clarify or check their understanding of key details and the main ideas in the material
- followed task instructions and references carefully, responding appropriately to the command words in the question to base their answers on the correct text and/or section of text
- focused on the evidence of skills and understanding they needed to demonstrate for each of the three extended response questions
- considered the marks allocated to each question and targeted their response time accordingly
- paid attention to the guidance offered in tasks – for example, identifying a word/phrase (not a sentence) in each part of **2(a)**, indicating clearly the one example from the text extract they were
- using in **2(c)** and explaining three examples from each of the two paragraphs identified in **2(d)**
- avoided repetition, inventing irrelevant material and/or introducing their own opinion
- used their own words where specified in the question, avoiding unselective copying and/or lifting from the text
- planned the ideas they were intending to use before writing their answers to longer questions and writing no more than 120 words in the summary
- selected the most appropriate material that was required for the response to the question
- checked and edited their responses to correct any careless errors or unclear points.

General comments

Candidates' responses indicated familiarity with the format of the Reading paper and understanding of the general demands of the three tasks, though there were still some candidates who did not pay attention to the guidance in the task instructions and consequently missed opportunities to evidence skills and understanding. There were instances where whole tasks had not been attempted and occasions where responses to part questions were incomplete or missing, limiting opportunities to score higher marks.

Responses to the questions set indicated that candidates had found all three texts equally accessible and engaging. Occasionally, a failure to complete all aspects of a task and/or a loss of focus on the rubric limited the evidence of understanding and skills offered or resulted in redundant material. For example, some candidates wrote more than the maximum 120 words advised for the selective summary **Question 1(f)**. In **Question 2(d)**, a few candidates attempted to choose and explain three choices from paragraphs other than the two identified, whilst others selected from only one.

In **Question 1**, candidates who scored well had worked through the tasks in the order presented and made efficient use of their time, for example by paying attention in **Questions 1(a)–(e)** to the marks and space available as a helpful indicator of the length and detail they needed to offer in each response. They focused on answering each question as set and avoided including any unnecessary material. Most candidates followed the line or paragraph references in the questions carefully to help them to move down Text A in order and to direct their attention. In a test of comprehension, it is important to remember their responses to these initial short answer questions needed to be derived from the text in order to evidence their Reading skills and are not based on personal opinion or experience. Less successful responses sometimes repeated the language of the question where own words were specified as being required; such responses provided

no evidence of understanding as a consequence – for example, in **1(b)(i)** suggesting that ‘this means they were mysterious monsters.’ In **Question 1(f)** a few candidates relied heavily on the language of the text and/or copied whole sections of text, limiting the available evidence of their own skills and understanding.

In **Question 2** candidates needed first to identify **(2(a))** and explain **(2(b))** words and phrases from the final text, moving towards an explanation of how language was being used by the writer via **Question 2(c)** and on to the language task, **Question 2(d)**. More successful answers were careful to refer back to Text C to locate specific relevant choices and consider meaning in context. Opportunities for marks were missed by some candidates in **Question 2(c)** who did not clearly identify one example from the text extract to explain and in **Question 2(a)** by those who copied out whole sentences from the text rather than identifying the exact word/phrase that matched the sense of just the underlined word/phrase in the question. To aim for higher levels in **Question 2(d)**, candidates should ensure that they explore and explain the meaning of each of the words chosen in some detail before moving on to consider associations and connotations or suggest effects.

Many did not notice the comical/assumed aspect of Ocean King’s character the ‘Ocean King’ – for example some suggested he was an old man who was young at heart, rather than a young man dressed as an old and rather stereotyped/unconvincing character from the sea. Others gave examples of Eloise’s behaviour when she ‘rolled her eyes dismissively’ and ‘listened attentively’ rather than describing Ocean King’s appearance as specified in the question. Most were able to suggest six potentially useful examples for analysis – three in each half – for the **2(d)** task and offer basic effect/meaning in context, though a number of candidates were not sufficiently clear or detailed in the examination of their choices. In less successful responses, generalised comment, repetition of the language of the text or labelling of devices without explanation of how these were working meant opportunities to target higher levels were missed. This included generic comments such as ‘It creates an effect of seeing what Jenny’s seeing to make it feel like you’re actually in the depths of the ocean’. A small number of candidates offered few or no choices in **Question 2(d)**.

In **Question 3**, candidates were often able to develop their responses with detailed descriptions of the hotel, Eloise’s feelings and reactions. For the most part, they had attempted to include ideas relevant to all three bullets of the task, though a few lost focus on the text – for example, writing creatively about historic experiences of scuba diving and swimming accidents as a child, or lengthy explanations about travel including time spent at airports. Misreading included suggesting they were going to either live in Ocean Hotel or stay for days or weeks, rather than a day and a night, or involved changing Eloise into someone who really enjoyed extreme sports by the end of the trip, when it was clear she had not enjoyed her time at Ocean Hotel. Most candidates had remembered to write from Eloise’s perspective, with the best focused on interpreting the evidence in the text throughout. Less successful responses either offered only brief reference to the passage, included evidence of misreading and/or repeated sections from the text with minimal modification. Along with unselective copying, reliance on the language of the text to communicate ideas is an indicator of less secure understanding and to be avoided.

Paper 1 is primarily a test of Reading, though 15 of the 80 marks available are for Writing – divided between **Question 1(f)** and **Question 3**. In these questions, it is important that candidates consider the clarity and register of their writing. It is advisable to plan and review responses to avoid inconsistencies of style, serious errors that impede communication of ideas and awkward expression. Candidates should be aware that unclear writing is likely to limit their achievement, as will over-reliance on the language of the passages. It is also advisable to leave sufficient time to edit and correct responses.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 Comprehension and summary task

Questions 1(a)–(e)

Short answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** required candidates to read and respond to Text A. Strong responses paid careful attention to the command words and paragraph references in the instructions to demonstrate effectively and efficiently the evidence of understanding required. Some mid-range responses missed opportunities to target higher marks, for example through overlong explanations, offering own word answers where these were not needed and/or repeating language of the text where own words were required. The task guidance makes it clear where use of own words is necessary. Less well focused answers on occasion diluted the evidence of understanding by including additional unnecessary material and/or extra guesses – an inefficient use of examination time. Successful responses followed the order of the sub questions to work

through the text from the beginning and provided evidence of understanding of the need to interpret and use details in the text carefully to answer each of the comprehension questions.

(a) How large do scientists think a giant squid can be, according to the text?

In **Question 1(a)** candidates needed to describe the size of a giant squid according to the text. The majority of candidates successfully answered this question. A few responses confused this with the size of the squid that attached itself to Mr Kersauson's boat which was said to be between 'seven or eight metres long'.

(b) Using your own words, explain what the text means by:

- (i) 'elusive monsters' (line 3)**
- (ii) 'apparently clamped' (line 5)**

In **Question 1(b)** task guidance made it clear that use of own words was required to evidence understanding. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was sometimes the result of having explained just one aspect of the phrase, for example in **Question 1(b)(i)** attempting to explain 'monsters' only. There was more difficulty in the explanation of 'elusive' as being hard to find. Some candidates did not define both words but offered 'rarely seen monsters' or 'elusive beasts'. More effective answers were able to indicate that they had securely understood the meaning of both aspects of the question in the context of the text – for example, in **1(b)(i)** that 'apparently clamped' meant 'seemed to have attached' or 'supposedly held tightly'.

(c) Re-read paragraphs 4 and 5 ("I saw a tentacle" ... steering impossible.').

Give two reasons why the giant squid's actions in pulling the boat and blocking the rudder might have caused alarm.

In **Question 1(c)** most candidates were able to identify two distinct reasons why the giant squid's actions in pulling the boat and blocking the rudder might have caused alarm. Many candidates were able to score both marks by clearly offering two separate points, often by identifying that the boat could not be steered, or it might have pulled the boat off course. Where candidates failed to gain both marks, it was usually because they repeated the words of the question stem, such as 'pulling the boat hard' or 'blocking the rudder'.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 6, 7, 8 and 9 ('Giant squid often feature ... he says.').

- (i) Identify two main ways in which Mr Kersauson's giant squid was different from the giant squid in Jules Verne's novel.**
- (ii) Explain why Mr Kersauson was ill-prepared to deal with the giant squid.**

Candidates who paid attention to command/key words in the question were best placed to offer creditworthy responses and make efficient use of their time. For example, in **part (i)** they were careful to offer the two main ways in which Mr Kersauson's giant squid was different from the giant squid in Jules Verne's novel. Many candidates were denied the marks as they focused on what Mr Kersauson did or did not do rather than the giant squid, such as 'he did not have to cut off its tentacles' or confused the squid in the novel with the one Mr Kersauson encountered. In **part (ii)**, most candidates were able to identify more than one reason, though there was frequent repetition of not having anything to scare it off and only having penknives.

(e) Re-read paragraph 10 ('Giant squid live deep ... a year ago.').

Using your own words, explain why humans do not know much about giant squid.

In **Question 1(e)** the most successful explanations showed that candidates were able to derive three distinct reasons of the four available in paragraph 10. Candidates who recast the relevant information using their own words as instructed were best able to demonstrate that they had teased out and understood the implied reasons why humans do not know much about giant squid – with many offering all four ideas by describing how they live at the bottom of the sea, there have been very few sightings, they are mostly found dead, and their corpses are often damaged. Occasionally, less focused responses described them as being found in the sea rather than the depths or where humans cannot easily go.

- (f) **According to Text B, what are the arguments against swimming with dolphins and what are responsible tour operators doing to improve the situation?**

You must use continuous writing (not note form) and use your own words as far as possible. Your summary should not be more than 120 words.

In their responses to **Question 1(f)** most candidates were able to demonstrate at least a general understanding of some relevant ideas from Text B and some understanding of the requirements of the task. There were a number of examples of wholesale copying and lifting. All points on the mark scheme were covered over the range of answers seen, though repetition of the same idea and/or misreading of details meant opportunities were missed by many candidates to target higher marks.

Where responses were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words and to keep their explanations concise. Some mid-range answers did not immediately direct their response towards the focus of the task, offering a redundant introduction to their response to set the scene (often referencing swimming with dolphins as being an important achievement on many people's bucket list). Less well-focused responses copied from the text, with minimal or no rewording or reorganisation of the original, often resulting in redundancy. Frequently copied phrases included 'highly stressful', 'tourism-driven economies', 'limiting numbers', 'take the lead', 'risk of transmitting diseases', 'captive enclosures' and 'long term psychological problems'. Whilst candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms in their prose response, they should not rely on lifting whole phrases and/or sentences from the text and where suitable own word alternatives are available should make use of them. Indiscriminate copying of the passage, repetition and adding comment or example should all be avoided as these do not allow candidates to successfully address the selective summary task.

The strongest responses to the selective summary task showed evidence of candidates having planned a route through the content of their answer before writing their response. There were some extremely effective and well-crafted responses that focused on both parts of the question including arguments against swimming with dolphins and what responsible tour operators are doing as presented by Text B. These responses demonstrated both concision and precise understanding of a wide range of relevant ideas including the threat of extinction, stress, psychological effects, impact on the local economy and potential of transmitting diseases by swimming with dolphins in captivity. They also described the actions of responsible tour operators such as limiting the number of tourists, allowing dolphins to take the initiative, avoiding touching them, showing respect and watching from land.

Most candidates appeared to be aware of the need to try to use their own vocabulary where feasible without changing the original idea and to organise points helpfully for their reader. Occasionally, candidates overlooked the need for concision in a selective summary task and significant excess arose as a result of lengthy explanation, with some candidates continuing to write far more than the maximum of 120 words advised in the task guidance. Others followed the advised length of the response but took far too long to explain just a few ideas. Effective answers demonstrated that they had understood a fairly wide range of relevant ideas, communicating these accurately and concisely in their own words. Less effective responses sometimes relied on trying to offer a précis of the whole text in the order it was presented. Many of these answers simply tracked through and replayed the text, substituting occasional own words – an approach that diluted evidence that the text and/or task had been understood. They also spent time unwisely providing unnecessary details about dolphins breathing air and their need to surface regularly. Many of these least effective responses also tended to have misread key details – for example, they thought that keeping dolphins in captivity was part of the solution.

Length was often an indicator of the relative success of a response. Some responses were far too long or wordy due to the inclusion of unnecessary information or comments. The least effective responses were overly reliant on the language of the original. Candidates are reminded that lifting sections of text is unlikely to evidence understanding of either the ideas in the passage or requirements of the task.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(f):

- after reading the task instructions, re-read Text B to identify only those potentially relevant ideas you can use in your answer
- plan your response by identifying and then discarding any ideas or extra details which are not relevant to the focus of the question
- check your ideas are distinct and complete – for example, whether there are repeated ideas which could be combined or ideas which might need further explanation
- plan the ideas you are going to include ahead of writing your response – draw a neat line through your planning afterwards
- use your plan to help organise and sequence your ideas, grouping them where relevant, to ensure that your response is coherent and avoids repetition
- do not add details, examples or comment to the content of the passage
- write informatively and fluently in your own words, avoiding errors which affect meaning
- check back over your plan to ensure you have included the ideas you intended to
- keep in mind the guidance to write ‘no more than 120 words’ and aim for concision.

Question 2

- (a) **Identify a word or phrase from the text which suggests the same idea as the words underlined:**

- (i) **In the beginning, Ocean Hotel had been a base for studying marine life.**
(ii) **Eloise and Jenny often went scuba diving in earlier years.**
(iii) **Eloise pulled a disrespectful expression at Ocean King’s appearance.**
(iv) **Ocean King, costume removed, was now dressed in a dark blue scuba suit.**

The most successful responses to **Question 2(a)** clearly identified in each part the correct word or phrase from Text C to correspond with the meaning of the underlined example – simply just giving the word or phrase as their answer. Copying out the entire sentence adds unnecessary time pressure and means that the relevant part of the answer then has to be clearly indicated in some way – for example using brackets or underlining. Marks were sometimes missed where answers were incomplete (for example, giving ‘divested’ without ‘of his fishtail’). Others lacked focus, for example, copying out whole sentences, extra words or longer sections of text that went beyond the sense of the underlined word(s). Candidates should be reminded that they are required to select precisely in **Question 2(a)**.

- (b) **Using your own words, explain what the writer means by each of the words underlined:**

In its vicinity were coral reefs. My heart raced at this thought: I knew this would be our next trip away. As I pointed out to Eloise on the phone, she had chosen our last getaway – a sojourn in a sedate hotel where we’d reclined in comfortable chairs in the gardens, and she’d taken photographs of distant rolling hills.

- (i) **In its vicinity**
(ii) **sedate**
(iii) **reclined**

In **Question 2(b)**, the most successful answers had carefully considered the precise meaning in the context of each of the words underlined. Less successful responses simply repeated the word in their explanation – for example, ‘reclined means to recline’ – or did not offer sufficiently precise explanation for understanding of the individual word specified to be credited – for example, many candidates mistakenly described ‘sedate’ as ‘remote’ or ‘luxurious’.

- (c) **Use one example from the text below to explain how the writer suggests the narrator Jenny’s feelings during the day and evening.**

Use your own words in your explanation.

I passed the rest of my day diving happily, while Eloise sat on a sea wall, staring out across the ocean. In the evening, I took an energising freshwater shower, streamed marine conservation documentaries, played animated board games with a taciturn Eloise and feasted on both our pizzas, delivered with a regal bow by Ocean King.

In **Question 2(c)**, where candidates had focused clearly on using just one example taken from the extract, they were best placed to demonstrate their understanding. They often began with an explanation of meaning in context, before going on to explain what that suggested in relation to the writer's feelings. Some candidates clearly identified their example by underlining it in the text of the question or used it as a subheading for their answer. Successful responses focused on one example of Jenny's feelings during the day and evening and were able to exploit their chosen example to good effect to suggest something of the implied contented tone of the writer. The most commonly selected phrases were 'passed the rest of my day diving happily', 'energising freshwater shower' and 'feasted' and many offered satisfactory explanations of meaning(s) as a useful starting point for their explanation, though in some less successful answers there was a tendency to repeat the words of the choice in explanations, for example, suggesting that Jenny was 'happy' whilst diving or had 'more energy' following her shower.

Most successful responses had carefully noted the number of marks available and focused their response to make three distinct points in relation to their one chosen example. Less successful responses often attempted to discuss more than one example, which was an unwise use of time, or commented on Eloise rather than Jenny. Some weaker responses did not pay careful attention to the instruction to select from the given extract and attempted to paraphrase the whole extract and/or discuss it in very general terms.

(d) Re-read paragraphs 8 and 10.

- **Paragraph 8 begins 'Our induction to hotel rules' and is about Ocean King's appearance as he explains the rules of Ocean Hotel.**
- **Paragraph 10 begins 'Almost immediately' and is about Jenny's scuba diving experience in the lagoon next to Ocean Hotel.**

Explain how the writer uses language to convey meaning and to create effect in these paragraphs. Choose three examples of words or phrases from each paragraph to support your answer. Your choices should include the use of imagery.

The most successful responses to **Question 2(d)** offered clear analysis of six relevant choices – three from each paragraph. They often started by explaining literal meaning in context and then moving on to consider effect, for example, suggesting the impacts and associated connotations created by the writer's language choices. These responses demonstrated understanding of how the writer was using language through detailed discussion of sharply focused choices. They considered words within their choices individually, as well as suggesting how they worked within the longer phrase and/or in the context of the description as a whole, before building to an overview. Where candidates selected slightly longer choices, comments tended to be more generalised. Less successful responses did not demonstrate understanding when they relied on repeating the language of the text within their explanation which tended to be only partially effective or thin. Successful responses often set out to identify those relevant selections that they felt best able to explain rather than simply selecting the first three choices in each paragraph. Level 5 responses frequently showed imagination and precision when discussing images, for example in relation to Ocean King's 'fluorescent-green fishtail' giving the impression of it seeming 'childish' or 'artificial'.

When dealing with paragraph 8, the most successful answers had identified the eccentric and unconvincing appearance of Ocean King and that he was a young man dressed up as an old man. Some candidates had misread details of the text and their explanations were limited as a result – for example, some suggested that his hair and beard were real and assumed he was unfriendly because of his eyebrows, likening them to a bear, although they were part of his costume. Some candidates described how the girls were frightened of him as he announced the rules of the hotel, interpreting his 'frown' as being threatening and missed the nuance of his 'twinkling' eyes which showed he was enjoying the joke. Some candidates misinterpreted 'tresses' as 'clothing' and thought he did not take care of his appearance so assumed the hotel would be poorly maintained. 'Bedraggled' was generally understood as 'messy' when describing Ocean King's dishevelled appearance.

Some mid-range answers offered more careful selection and explanation in one half of the answer than the other – often failing to target higher levels by repeating words such as ‘shocking’, ‘silvery’ or ‘glittering’ when discussing paragraph 10 rather than finding synonyms to evidence understanding of meaning. Some candidates who wrote more general comments about the atmosphere as being mystical under the ocean and missed opportunities to consider the distinct meanings of each word in ‘swirling fingers’ and ‘dainty structures flashed like firecrackers’ which might have resulted in higher marks. Many candidates offered basic effects – for example, suggesting that ‘darted’ meant the fish were moving speedily like a dart, whilst those offering evidence of understanding at higher levels were often able to go on to consider how the image of the striped clownfish darting might show their freedom to move as they please and was reflective of Jenny’s excitement. Higher level responses skilfully linked these images to provide an overview of a romanticised magical underwater world.

The least successful answers to **Question 2(d)** offered inappropriate comments such as ‘The writer uses language really well to convey meaning and to create effect.’ These empty, generic comments are unlikely to be a useful starting point for discussion of how language is working. Candidates working at higher levels were often able to visualise images, using explanation of precise meaning/what you could ‘see/hear happening’ in context as the starting point for their explanation of effect.

In **Question 2(d)**, answers which simply list literary devices used and/or copy from each paragraph without careful consideration of the examples to be discussed are not likely to evidence the skills and understanding necessary to target higher marks. It is the quality of the analysis which attracts marks in a language question. Selections in **Question 2(d)** need to be clear and deliberate, helping to focus the analysis which follows. Opportunities were missed in some answers where choices were from one paragraph only. The most successful answers were often able to explain their understanding of words within relevant choices, considering different possibilities of meaning, associations and connotations, and then demonstrating why these particular words might have been used by the writer in this context.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- make sure that the language choices you select from the text are precise and accurate – do not copy out lines or chunks of text, miss out key words or include only part of the choice
- clearly identify your selection in each part of **2(a)** – remember you are looking for a word or phrase, not a whole sentence
- in **2(b)** be careful not to include extra incorrect guesses that might detract from the evidence that you understand the meaning of the word you are explaining
- in **2(c)** clearly identify the one example from the text excerpt you are going to explain
- in **2(d)**, choose six choices in total: three examples from each of the two specified paragraphs
- when explaining how language is working avoid general comments such as ‘this makes the reader feel as if they are there’ – you need to explain how your chosen example does this to show understanding
- show how your explanations deal with each of the key words within an identified choice separately as well as how they work together
- start by explaining meaning within the context of the text before moving on to effect
- when exploring and explaining images, consider the connotations and associations of the words within choices to help you to suggest the effect the writer might have wanted to create
- allow time to edit your answers – for example, to check you have not repeated the same explanations of effects for each language choice.

Question 3:

You are Eloise. After you arrive home from your stay at Ocean Hotel, you write an entry in your journal about your experience.

In your journal entry you should:

- explain how you felt when you first learnt about Jenny’s plan to stay at Ocean Hotel and why you felt like this
- describe Ocean Hotel and your reactions to what happened there
- describe your feelings now and your thoughts on how to approach Jenny about the next trip away.

Having worked through **Question 2** and already familiarised themselves with Text C, candidates following the order of tasks as set were best placed to think their way into the thoughts, feelings and reactions of Eloise following her stay with her friend Jenny at the Ocean Hotel. The three bullet points in the question offered guidance to candidates to help them identify relevant ideas for their journal entry. The first and second bullets required candidates to retrieve relevant information from the text and adapt it to fit Jenny's perspective about how she felt about Jenny's plan to stay at Ocean Hotel and why, and her reactions to what happened there. The third bullet required candidates to describe her current feelings and her thoughts on how to approach Jenny about the next trip away using ideas and clues in the text to support their inferences. Most candidates were able to show general understanding of the text addressing the task by using some of the main ideas in the text to support the response. Successful responses delighted in using language which expressed Eloise's horror, outrage, disappointment at and stoical acceptance of Jenny's suggestion and the experience she had. They reflected the whole experience with subtle reference to Jenny's former boredom, the sense of obligation Eloise felt and sense of guilt at her behaviour, and their different natures. They acknowledged the beauty of the marine life, yet the urgent desire to escape the confines of the hotel and Eloise's indulgent enthusiasms for dry land and the comforts of home. If revenge was on some candidates' minds, many others settled for compromise, with some able to suggest reasonable holiday options for the next trip away.

The first bullet of the question invited candidates to revisit details in the text related to Eloise's feelings about Jenny's plan to stay at Ocean Hotel. Most candidates were able to offer a number of relevant explicit ideas, with answers aiming at higher marks dealing successfully with both parts of the bullet point to offer relevant development. Almost all mentioned more straightforward explicit ideas – it was an underwater hotel, it involved scuba diving and the induction. Although a number of candidates recognised that it was Jenny's turn to select the holiday, fewer were able to explicitly describe the differences in their holiday preferences. Many of the responses were able to develop the ideas by creating a convincing voice for Eloise, although a number misread the instructions and wrote from Jenny's perspective or confused the names of the two characters. Others mistakenly assumed the 'sedate' hotel trip had yet to have been taken or the planning for the Ocean Hotel trip was being made while Jenny and Eloise were sitting in a port hole. Many of those candidates who had not read sufficiently closely felt Eloise enjoyed the trip and had her wholeheartedly embrace Jenny's idea and the underwater hotel experience to the extent that she was ready to go back again or engage in other such wildly spirited and energetic activities that the world had to offer – not in keeping with the character of Eloise portrayed in the text. A number of candidates also misunderstood the rules involving cameras and face cream, with some suggesting that Eloise had forgotten these and left them at home. Where candidates had kept in mind that this task was a test of their Reading and woven in useful details from the passage in reflecting and developing Eloise's thoughts they did well, but there were other less successful responses that drifted too far from Text C – for example, offering lengthy descriptions of earlier traumatic scuba diving incidents that resulted in Eloise's dislike of it. Others believed Eloise to be very old as she dived in her 'younger days' and suggested she no longer dived because she was far too old.

Most answers to bullet two presented a description of Ocean Hotel, though mainly through the details of the hotel's outside appearance which was a 'ten metre dive below sea-level' to enter, with a 'shimmering yellow entrance', and its facilities, such as playing board games or watching documentaries. Some candidates did not understand that Ocean King was the manager and a young man dressed up in a silly and gimmicky costume with a fishtail but described him as creepy. By misreading 'divested', they went on to believe the diving guide was a different person from the manager who had removed his former costume. Further misreading included how Eloise, rather than Jenny, enjoyed the pizzas and ate both of them. Mid-range and better answers had often dealt with some of the details of the different marine life – for example, that Eloise had had enough after a while or she was annoyed she could not take photographs. Fewer answers included reference to the night-time noises and some confused Eloise's earmuffs for headphones and described her listening to music. However, answers operating at higher levels often included these and other implicit ideas such as her difficulty in sleeping and the lack of healthy food or more varied options. In the weakest responses, ideas relevant to bullet two were often only hit upon in passing – with sections of text replayed or even copied – limiting the evidence of skills and understanding.

Almost all answers to bullet three described Eloise's relief at being home, whilst others developed it by expressing guilt for not enjoying the trip. Some losing focus on Text C, misread the tone and suggested Eloise enjoyed the trip and described future holidays involving activities such as bungee jumping and paragliding. Answers in the mid-range or better often picked up on the idea that Eloise and Jenny should go on separate holidays or reach a compromise for future holidays that involved a mixture of relaxing scenery and exhilarating activity. The least successful responses did not address this bullet at all or suggested that they would allow Jenny to plan the next trip, despite them taking it in turns to do so.

On the whole, candidates seemed familiar with the requirements of a journal entry, and many were able to use an appropriate register, drawing on a range of suitable vocabulary to express their ideas. Where candidates relied too heavily on the structure and/or language of the original text to communicate, expression often became awkward and/or lost clarity. Some candidates producing answers in the mid-range showed some awareness of appropriate register though would have benefitted from checking back through their work to ensure that their meaning was clear throughout in order to offer more secure evidence of their Writing and Reading skills. The least successful responses to **Question 3** copied sections of text with minimal modification and rarely adequately addressed bullet three. A few of the weakest answers had attempted to answer **Question 3** with very little reference to Text C or frequently copied sections. The most convincing answers had recognised Eloise's negative attitude towards this experience and had clearly revisited the passage to examine carefully the details relating to their stay at Ocean Hotel.

Advice to candidates on Question 3:

- read Text C carefully, more than once, to identify ideas and details you can adapt for use in your answer
- decide on the voice and style you want to create and maintain that in your answer
- base your response on clues and evidence in the text to help you make judgements about characters and do not invent information that is not clearly linked to the details in the text
- try to do more than just repeat details of what happened: developing ideas appropriately within the context of the text allows you to better show your understanding, for example by explaining feelings or commenting from the point of view of the character you are writing as
- give equal attention to each of the three bullet points: the bullet points are designed to help you to identify a wide range of relevant ideas you can use in your answer so make sure you have covered all aspects of each bullet
- use your own words as far as possible and avoid copying from the text
- leave sufficient time to check through your response.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/21
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise their writing effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- understand how different audiences, purposes and genres should influence the style adopted
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

General comments

Examiners found that in the great majority of cases, candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Although there were few extremely brief scripts or responses which showed significant misunderstanding of tasks, some scripts showed a degree of confusion about the requirements of narrative and descriptive writing. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, with very few rubric infringements seen by Examiners. In **Question 1**, most responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, with only a small number mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a letter to a friend. There was in most a clear attempt to address the central issue in the texts, the selection and purchasing of appropriate gifts. Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages. More effective answers also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response, often making suggestions about the cultural and personal importance of gift-giving in their own lives. Comments made about the different types of gifts available and their relative importance and desirability were largely rooted in the ideas given in the reading texts and showed some ability to probe and challenge those ideas.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little opinion on the suitability of particular types of gifts or gift experiences, with some beginning to evaluate less explicit ideas in the reading material. A substantial number of responses in this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts, though without really tackling their shared central concept: how do we choose the perfect gift for a particular individual?

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. Others produced summaries of what each text said with limited understanding of how to adapt the ideas in them for a helpful letter to a friend. A small but significant number of responses were comparative analyses of the texts themselves rather than evaluation of the ideas in them.

Most made good use of the bullet points in the question to help structure the response, and the ideas in the texts were scrutinised thoughtfully in more effective responses. Less effective responses sometimes showed limited awareness of the specific audience required, providing a commentary on the texts but without adaptation to the style and format of a letter beyond an initial salutation. Overall, however, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register appropriately, and at the higher levels, some understanding shown of how an effectively structured and supported argument would be most helpful to the intended recipient, and how language can be employed to engage and persuade the reader.

The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and some exhortation thoroughly to consider the personality and needs of the intended receiver of the gift, or to refute the materialistic assertions of the texts, both explicit and implicit. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the texts with less selection and reordering of points from the originals. This sometimes resulted in responses which had less overall coherence.

In **Section B**, effective responses to the composition questions were characterised by a clear understanding of the genre selected, descriptive or narrative, and of the features of good writing in each.

Descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very effective and sustained. There were some detailed descriptions of discoveries along a previously unknown path in the first descriptive writing question which Examiners found engaging and effective. Some with close detail and description of the feelings evoked in the observer also successfully evoked atmosphere. In the second task, which was far less often attempted, across the mark range, there was a variety of situations and scenarios described, often busy stations or restaurants, although some responses seemed to ignore the requirements of the genre and embarked upon discursive examinations of the pressures of modern commercial life or education. Less effective responses to both questions tended to become narratives quite quickly, or lengthy narrative preambles to set the scene rather over-balanced the main focus of the task. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and engagingly. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions tended to lose descriptive focus.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were credible. Both narrative questions elicited a wide range of approaches and interpretations and Examiners awarded marks across the range here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question employed a range of approaches, although Mystery, Horror and Monster genres appeared frequently across the mark range. Perhaps less imaginatively approached, the second narrative question sometimes produced more convincing and credible stories and characters, based on personal experience which gave purpose and cohesion to the story. While some included believable and realistic events, other less effective narratives were less credible or were under-developed in style and less cohesive in structure.

Some composition responses would have benefited from a clearer grasp of the features of good writing in specific genres. The best descriptive writing was specific, used some original and thought-provoking imagery and effectively evoked the atmosphere of the time and place described. The conscious shaping of narratives to interest and intrigue the reader and the creation of credible characters and dialogue were features understood by the most effective writers who chose narrative writing options.

In **Section B**, several responses used a pre-determined structure and content which seemed imposed on the task and not always relevant to it.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

Imagine you have a friend who is considering whether to buy a gift experience for someone they know, or to choose another type of gift. They have asked for your advice.

Write a letter to your friend offering your advice.
In your letter you should:

- evaluate the ideas, opinions and attitudes given in both texts
- explain what your friend needs to consider when deciding on the most appropriate type of gift for this person
- give reasons to support your advice

Base your letter on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address all of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Question 1

Marks for reading

15 marks were available for Reading in **Question 1**.

Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which focused on the central dilemma of choosing between a material or an 'experience' gift, rather than writing generally about gift-giving.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised tended to determine the level of candidates' achievement. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, the nature of the relationship between giver and receiver, and the cultural norms involved which could cause offence if ignored. Reading marks in Level 6 could be awarded where the tendentious nature of the assertions in both texts were challenged and probed, and the commercialisation of relationships they exposed. This was relatively rare however, and in only a minority of responses were the identities of the texts' authors – as owners or managers of firms dependent on the sale of expensive objects or experiences – considered; thus, many opportunities for the evaluation of their views were missed.

Most marks for Reading remained in Level 4 or at the lower end of Level 5. Here a range of points from the texts were offered, most responses agreeing with the point about everyone nowadays having 'too much stuff', and that an object for the home would be displayed and treasured for a long time. Assertions that a high standard of gift was expected and that each gift had to be better than the last were not often challenged, but when they were and a counterargument developed, marks in Level 6 could be awarded. Very many responses made a single evaluative point, often that the tastes and personality of the recipient should be considered: 'You wouldn't want to give your auntie a balloon ride if she suffers from vertigo.' However if the response also reproduced and developed several points from the reading material in a cohesive manner a mark at the bottom of Level 5 could be awarded.

In this examination series it was noted that a considerable number of responses to **Question 1** were quite brief, thus obviating the opportunity to create the 'thorough response' required for Level 5. There was also a widespread tendency to accept at face value the claims in Text B more than in Text A, only a minority arguing that 'experience' gifts could be just as ill-chosen, unsuitable or environmentally damaging as material objects. One most insightful and strongly argued response recognised that 'experiences' had to be as carefully considered as other gifts if they were not to be remembered for all the wrong reasons, but hailed

their many possibilities beyond the immediate: a new interest or dimension in the life of the recipient could be developed, and the quality of the relationship much enhanced: 'You can join them in a wonderful experience, and bond with them, and even live vicariously through them.'

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Levels 4 and 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the varying benefits of different types of gifts, and although the idea of giving home-made gifts from Text A was often broached, but sometimes coupled with unrealistic proposals: 'She would love a round-the-world trip, maybe seeing the Taj Mahal, or you could give her some home-made brownies.' Most responses reproduced ideas from both texts and offered a little comment and development on some of them before concluding with a recommendation. Here Examiners could award marks in Level 4, and when justification for their choices reached some evaluation a mark in Level 5 could be given. It was frequently noted that where a response imagined a specific recipient – a grandparent, a girlfriend, a colleague – evaluation was more likely to occur. Marks of 5 or 6, in Level 3, were awarded when a range of points was reproduced and some limited but sensible opinion offered. Here, marks for Writing were often of a higher level than for Reading. At the lower levels simple reproduction of the points on offer was characteristic of responses. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the texts and this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Occasionally the response was not presented as a letter and often began in a way which showed this, such as 'Text A says that...'

Some less successful responses were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, and only insignificant changes were made to the wording of the texts. A few responses showed very little connection with the texts, sometimes just writing generally about gifts and celebrations. These were very few but perhaps a little more common than in recent years.

Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

Candidates could adopt a range of appropriate styles and registers for their letters and could show their understanding of the intended audience, a friend, in a variety of ways. Across the ability range, an apt, fairly conversational but standard English style allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many letters began with an appropriate greeting and lively introduction which engaged the interest of the reader while clearly establishing the main purpose of the letter. Some high scoring responses used a more rhetorical style, presenting their advice clearly and persuasively in an engaging way which was effective in the context. A tone which reflected a familiarity between writer and audience worked well for some: 'Oh isn't this a dilemma? Remember when you got just the worst present for your uncle? Don't want to repeat that!'

Other choices were made in favour of a more informative style, thoughtfully setting out the perceived advantages and disadvantages of different types of gifts and exhorting the reader of the letter to weigh them against the constraints of budget, relationship with the intended recipient, or ease of availability. Some effective responses did refer directly to the texts but contextualised them so that the register was not marred: 'You'll be glad to know I did some research for you, and two articles I read were particularly useful ...' This approach also allowed the question of the authors' biases or vested interests to be addressed more easily.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage the reader rather than just summarising the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, responses which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the style of a letter were sometimes limited in the marks available.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a convincing letter. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through Text A then Text B, sometimes offering a brief concluding paragraph to summarise their advice, less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience could know or understand.

Structure

As mentioned above, responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged were clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a whole rather than a disjointed response to two quite different texts. The central debate about the relative virtues of two different types of gifts was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent and cohesive response. The opening and concluding paragraphs of the most effective responses tended to introduce and sum up the main thrust of the advice requested, with the intervening sections supplying supporting detail. The advice being offered determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording but not reordering of ideas. While some brief opinion was sometimes given at the end of the response, these views were unconnected with the ideas outlined up to that point or were contradicted by some comments which had come before.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a writing mark in Level 6. These responses were often entirely appropriate in style and convincing in their arguments but also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary, and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader.

Some complex sentence structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts, and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation often employing colons and semi-colons to clarify ideas.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Sentences were frequently separated by commas rather than full stops. Semi-colons were sometimes inserted inappropriately and homophones were wrongly selected. There was inconsistent use, sometimes within sentences, of pronouns such as 'one', 'you' and 'their'.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. The omission of definite or indefinite articles was very common. Tense errors and agreement errors were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response was the candidate's own.

Examiners marking word-processed scripts noted a higher than usual frequency of multiple minor errors. In some of these responses, errors were so frequent that Examiners could only award marks for writing in levels lower than those for reading.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- **Be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.**
- **Take note of any direction at the beginning of the texts such as the identification of their authors: this provides more opportunity for evaluation of their views**
- **Make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.**
- **Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.**
- **Think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.**
- **Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.**

Section B

Descriptive Writing

Either

Question 2

Describe walking or riding along a path or track you have not explored before

Or

Question 3

Write a description with the title, 'Getting busier and busier'.

The first descriptive writing question was a considerably more popular choice for candidates than the second, although the latter produced some very accomplished responses. Both were interpreted in a variety of ways. In the first task, many kinds of paths were described: rural tracks, cliff paths, murky urban alleys, and suburban streets. The great majority described a walk or a bicycle ride, with just a few quite engaging ones on horseback. A very small number chose a more figurative approach, with the unfamiliarity of the 'path' arising from a changed direction in life or an emotional crisis. Occasionally this was effective in creating atmosphere, but elsewhere there was little descriptive detail but rather a monologue or narrative of events. Occasionally, the process of planning the walk or ride was recounted at length, overshadowing with narrative the description itself, although in some responses there was much to reward in these preambles for descriptive detail. This tendency to narrative and lack of specific detail was a more common weakness in the second question, although there were effective descriptions which evoked a busy atmosphere and its effects on the thoughts and emotions of the person involved or observing it.

Effective responses to the first question often created atmospheric and engaging pictures with a combination of sensory images and the thoughts and feelings of the speaker. In several higher-level responses the path was one enclosed and overshadowed by over-arching trees and foliage, creating a convincing atmosphere sometimes of comfort and safety but elsewhere of unsettling claustrophobia. Where the speaker was riding a horse there were extra opportunities in describing the animal as well as the surroundings, and the interactions between them: 'The claggy, malodorous mud disturbed the mare, as did the clamorous bird and insect song; she quivered beneath me.' In another effective description the speaker's glimpses through the trees evoked an intriguing back-story without lapsing into narrative: 'In the gaps in the foliage I took glances at the castle. Then and there, framed by nature and enhanced by distance, I gained an appreciation of the place I had not had while in its asphyxiating atmosphere.'

Elsewhere, a successful and engaging response described a well-trodden path near home traversed for the first time in darkness, when the mundane became magical. At differing levels of achievement there were descriptions of dangerous city alleyways and sun-bleached coastal paths opening onto sparkling blue seas. Sometimes the evocation of the sudden coolness of a sheltered path on a day of blistering heat was very effective. Effective if simple structure was usually provided by progress along the path itself, but in the higher levels was augmented by careful shaping and recurring motifs. The common difficulty of bringing a descriptive piece to a conclusion was mostly avoided by coming to the end of the path and briefly describing the new vista.

Most responses at all levels were clearly intended to describe and included at least some relevant detail. Many awarded marks in Level 4 did not achieve the 'convincing picture' required for Level 5 because they attempted far too wide an inclusion of natural or geographical features for a limited scenario: sometimes a short walk along a path encountered mountains, waterfalls, forests and many animals in uneasy juxtaposition. Several entered a path in a forest never seen before despite its being almost next to their house. At the lower end of this level plants, animals and landscape features were identified in a monotonous inventory rather than in 'well chosen' images. Here vocabulary was often a contributing issue: trees were tall and brown, and huge or small, leaves were green, flowers were just pink or red or yellow. Some responses in Level 3 described walking but not a path; others provided only a simple narrative about going somewhere new.

Responses to the second question, which was much less often selected than the first, produced some very engaging and evocative pieces but also some where the appropriate genre was apparently forgotten: both the highest marks for Descriptive Writing and the lowest were awarded for responses to this question. There

were a variety of scenarios: rail stations, schools, offices, restaurants and homes. One Level 6 response successfully evoked the exhaustion and frustration of a twenty-two-year-old university student obliged to care for his younger siblings while his widowed mother juggled three jobs to provide for them. Trying to snatch moments to read while providing clean school uniforms and packed lunches was effectively described while also conveying the guilt he felt at his own resentment of his sisters. A factor in conveying the increasing busyness of succeeding days was the successful employment of repeated sentence openers for effect: 'I have to...I have to...; 'I must...I must...' This was managed without lapsing into narrative. Another response achieving high marks chose a busy restaurant scenario, perhaps reminiscent of a task in a previous examination series but fitting it perfectly to this question by a subtle structuring: different times of the day were described using recurring motifs of counter tops, utensils, waiters' uniforms and the chef's temper. All of these, pristine and gleaming in the moments before opening, suffered closely observed degradation as the day went on. A response awarded marks at the top of Level 5 for Content and Structure evoked the hectic, almost manic atmosphere of a sky-scraper office almost entirely in sound images: elevators pinging, phones ringing, heels clacking, bosses shouting, keyboards tapping; this increasingly stress-inducing cacophony drove the observer to hide in a restroom cubicle.

Level 5 responses tended to use a wide range of details and were well-constructed, if a little less effective and cohesive than at the top Level overall. Responses in Level 4 often featured the same scenarios, but with less convincing detail, or a tendency at least in part to lapse into narrative. Here more stereotypical images were employed, with listing of images of busyness: suited businessmen rushing along, people running for trains, teenage bus passengers rapt by their phones. There was also often a failure to bring a piece to a structurally satisfactory conclusion.

Descriptions awarded Level 4 for Content and Structure tended to become a little unbalanced or included over-long narrative introductions about how and why the narrator was involved in the busy situation, including superfluous and tedious accounts of waking, dressing, having breakfast etcetera, followed by straightforward lists of what was seen and heard. At this level responses were not infrequently structured by categories of sensory images: 'I could hear...', 'I could smell...' This mechanical approach did not in itself preclude the creation of 'well-chosen images' or 'a convincing picture', but generally did not produce a cohesive and engaging descriptive piece.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed. Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted to the second question and these were rather more common than in previous series. A small but significant minority of responses were not descriptive in either intent or execution, but discursive or didactic, focusing on the evils of stress in the worlds of education and commerce; one was an unbroken diatribe about the malign effects of social media on the young. Where responses are outside the requirements and conventions of the desired genre, examiners struggle to award any but the lowest marks for Content but will endeavour to reward effective Structure.

High marks for Style and Accuracy often reflected the precise and varied vocabulary used as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, similar details were often included but better responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to create specific effects. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide -ranging vocabulary was lost by imprecise and inappropriate use.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks given in the middle range, even where other technical aspects of style were more accurate. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included mis-agreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and the omission of definite and indefinite articles, but fluctuating tense use was the most common serious error.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved:

- **Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.**
- **Keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.**
- **Write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.**

- **Use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.**

Narrative Writing

Either

Question 4

Write a story that includes the words. ‘...this was like no creature I’d encountered before...’

Or

Question 5

Write a story with the title, ‘The forest’.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a variety of plots, characters and scenarios in these responses, based on valid, relevant interpretations of the questions. Similar plotlines were used in many narrative responses such as a search for treasure or a rare animal in the first, and friends encountering danger on a forest camping trip in the second. The construction and execution of these plots, however, varied considerably in quality. More effective narratives showed a clear understanding of the other aspects of developed story-writing apart from a credible plot such as well drawn characters, a vivid evocation of setting and how to shape the narrative to interest and engage the reader, varying the pace to provide moments of drama and tension. Where stories were mostly a series of events told in a simple, chronological sequence, the lack of these elements of a more developed structure tended to limit the marks Examiners could award for Content and Structure. **Question 4**, while being much less frequently selected than **Question 5**, produced rather more varied storylines with marks awarded at every point on the range. Both narrative questions produced more responses in Level 3 than previously, and Examiners sometimes saw narratives which did not comfortably fit with either title, or, frequently in this examination session, would have fitted both, and were sometimes confusingly un-numbered.

Effective responses, as is often the case in narrative writing, were well organised and thoughtful interpretations of the title which used engaging, credible ideas to create developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension or drama and to vary the pace of the story were credited by Examiners as essential elements of narrative writing, as was the use of characterisation to create believable protagonists and characters. Responses to both questions featured a range of scenarios, although those within the horror/mystery genres predominated. There were monsters of many kinds, murders, abductions, drownings and suicides, often in plots so improbable even within the conventions of the genre that Examiners struggled to award higher marks for Content and Structure. A common trope in both featured a group of young people on a camping or exploration trip, ignoring the locals’ warnings about the mysterious island, cave or forest, and being picked off one by one by whatever malign creature resided in it. Some of the horror stories used only the most stereotypically familiar tropes that Examiners found it difficult to detect any originality or engaging features in the writing, but some responses created tension so successfully, with such convincing detail and characterisation, that very high marks could be awarded. The protagonist of one very well-crafted and humorous response to **Question 4** was a teenage boy who recklessly smashed a vase on the mantelpiece and was confronted by a previously gentle mother so transformed by rage and distress that she seemed truly a creature ‘never encountered’ before. It transpired that the ‘vase’ had contained her mother’s cremated ashes, now lost in the shag-pile carpet.

Another effective and convincing response concerned a rather jaded wild-life photographer who comes across a previously unidentified butterfly which seems able to change colour like a chameleon. Back in camp with photographs he knew would bring fame and long-sought professional recognition he underwent a crisis of conscience: ‘Scanning the shots that showed the transformation of its diaphanous wings from iridescent emerald to the palest green and then to barely-visible, pearlescent white I suddenly knew I could never expose this exquisite creature and its fragile habitat to the greedy world.’ He decided to destroy the photographs but then relented: ‘I’ll keep them but unpublished; I’ll always know what could have been.’ The characterisation of the narrator and the description of the butterfly showed a clear appreciation of how to engage and maintain the interest of the reader. Some successful responses used a figurative approach to the idea of the creature: a father denatured and brutalised by violence, or an externalisation of the narrator’s emotions. In the middle and lower ranges however characters were often undeveloped, sometimes given no more than a name, and plots were either improbable or repetitive and predictable. The creatures were frequently ‘enormous’ or ‘monstrous’, and often no further detail was given to engage or involve the reader.

There was often a lack of variety in tone, with the morning teeth-brushing in the preamble given the same weight as a fight to the death with a savage animal.

There were also some effective narratives to address the alternative question despite a lack of variety in the scenarios. In some the forest was a place of romance and nostalgia, or of a transformative experience in gaining life-skills, confidence or self-knowledge. Elsewhere the forest was metaphorical, a mental state of confusion and trial. More effective narratives created a convincing picture of the forest itself, with the description forming a backdrop appropriate to the plot. Elsewhere the forest – indicated by no more than a mention of trees or bushes – was simply a location for a story on which its existence had no bearing. A clear majority of responses however were based on a similar plot: a group of friends entered a forest, often in defiance of warnings that no-one ever returned alive from the place. Camp was set up, and one member of the group went off to find firewood. This person did not return, and the others set off to find them. Eventually only one was left, after discovering the bloodied remains of the group, who had been despatched by some undescribed psychopath or monster – often a gigantic bear. Naturally there was no signal to call for help from their mobile phone. The story ended with the survivor deciding sensibly never to enter the forest again or recounting their own violent death from beyond the grave. These responses only rarely achieved marks above Level 4. Some of these were quite well constructed with some effective characterisation, but often their lack of credibility failed to engage the reader. Very many were simple, unvarying re-telling of events.

Lower Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of good narrative writing. Characters and narrators tended to be more simply drawn and responses were often more dependent on a series of events, lacking attention to characterisation and setting. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were used as those in more effective narratives, but at this level there was a tendency to say what happened or to state who the characters were rather than drawing the reader in by shaping the narrative. Characters were identified but there was more time and emphasis given to relating events than developing characters as credible and rounded. In responses to both narrative questions too much time was spent in creating barely relevant back-stories or detailing everything leading up to the commencement of the action, from getting out of bed in the morning. Climax and resolution were then rushed and only summarily dealt with and no satisfactory ending was managed. Improbability did not only reside in fantastic stories of monsters and madness: not infrequently people set off to explore the Amazon rainforest with no more preparation than making a packed lunch. Several narratives simply stopped, as if the writer had run out of time. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 3, of which Examiners found more than in previous series, were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. Often there was little expression of feeling: 'I noticed there was a witch.' Scenarios which quickly became clichéd and unengaging were used and responses became confusing and muddled in attempting to control stories which were too wide-ranging or improbable.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed Examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent while Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range in vocabulary. In some responses, more often to the descriptive tasks, the over-use of alliteration created a contrived style. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors.

Common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as mis-agreements, missing articles and imprecise, sometimes ostentatious vocabulary which obscured meaning. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The omission of definite and indefinite articles, the incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing and were sometimes frequent enough to affect the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were

needed, was one of the most common weaknesses in Level 4/low Level 5 writing, though the mixing of tenses and the use of incomplete sentences were perhaps more prevalent in the descriptive writing. As in the descriptive writing, the important writing skill of editing was frequently forgotten in word-processed scripts which were littered with errors.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **Think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.**
- **Consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.**
- **Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on events.**
- **Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.**
- **Use complicated vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/22
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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

To achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise responses effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- adapt their style and structure for different audiences, purposes and genres
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required.

General comments

Examiners found that almost all candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted Question 1 and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, although a few candidates only responded to one question on the paper, usually the Composition. In **Question 1**, responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, but some were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert. These responses inevitably limited very severely the marks available for Examiners to award in both elements of assessment for this question.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of and some engagement with the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a speech given by a student to a gathering of interested parties in a school or college setting. There was in many a sound grasp of the main ideas about the advantages or disadvantages of handwriting lessons for younger students which were given in the reading texts.

Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages, although many included short phrases from the texts, such as handwriting being 'a better workout for the brain'. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response which argued consistently throughout. Effective responses showed some ability to probe and challenge the views given in the texts, often suggesting that prevailing conditions in modern life meant that both handwriting and the use of technology for producing written texts were necessary skills for children to be taught.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little personal opinion or a less specific exhortation to teach handwriting in schools, with some beginning to evaluate. A substantial number of responses at this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts with a little opinion on the topic in given at the end. These views tended to address the topic in general rather than the more specific arguments given in the reading texts, giving less evidence of close reading and understanding.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. The evidence for handwriting being beneficial for children, given in the texts,

tended to be reproduced at this level with limited comment on them to show more than an ability to understand surface meanings. Others produced summaries of what each text said, offering the writers' views but with very few comments of their own.

For the Writing mark, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to reflect the task and the purpose of the speech. In most cases, some understanding was shown of how speeches are structured and presented and how rhetorical devices such as questions and exclamations can be used to engage and persuade the audience. The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were lively but evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices sparingly but effectively to persuade. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the texts with less selection and reordering of ideas from the originals. This sometimes resulted in contradictory statements, weak paragraphing and less cohesion overall.

In Section B, descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very engaging and sustained, employing widely different interpretations of the questions. The idea of a 'flying creature or object' was interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Many successful responses described a setting in nature with birds of many types featuring as the main focus for description, both in appearance and movement. Airplanes and spaceships were also described and both kinds of interpretations were valid and often effective. In the second task, a 'moment of stillness' was interpreted in various ways and contexts. The reason for the 'stillness' was often an instance of quiet pleasure in the natural world but sometimes the moment was created by terrible shock or sudden realisation. Effective description of these scenes often focused on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as well as details of the surroundings. Some less successful responses to both questions were clearly intended as narratives rather than descriptions and Examiners found only limited descriptive content to reward. These tended to become dominated by events or lengthy narrative preambles, leaving less scope for descriptive detail. In the middle range, responses to the first question focused sometimes on a rather factual description of, for example, a military aircraft, in which the technical specification of engines or the colour of the livery was described. While there was some detail, these responses lacked engagement and interest for the reader. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and engagingly. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions were characterised by a lack of descriptive detail, a tendency to become narrative or a factual, rather concrete description which did not draw the reader in.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were well-prepared. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and Examiners awarded marks in all Levels here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question presented widely varied scenarios in which characters were faced with decisions about sporting, academic, criminal or other kinds of opportunities which proved pivotal in some way. Less effective responses often included quite similar scenarios to those more effective narratives but were less well controlled and the needs of the reader for a varied pace and shaping of the plot were less well understood.

The second narrative question elicited response with many interpretations of a 'Lost' from an internalised sense of the narrator having become hopeless or friendless to more literal interpretations of becoming separated from a group during a walk or hike. Less effective narratives tended to become a series of events which while relevant to the task were not developed, engaging narratives. Many involved camping trips with characters who were simply named rather than brought to life and narrators who inevitably got lost in dark forests. These kinds of responses were usually resolved in less satisfying ways such as simply being discovered by friends or finding their way back. A number of less successful responses to both narrative questions wrote more discursively on the kinds of opportunities one should not miss or, for the second question, a few responses described a state of mind but there was very limited narrative content and progression overall. While these were often organised and paragraphed, they were not narrative in intent or development.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Imagine that schools in your area are considering either introducing or abandoning handwriting lessons for all younger students. You have been invited to speak at a meeting of teachers and parents to discuss the idea.

Write the words of your speech.

In your speech you should:

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions given in both texts about handwriting and keyboard skills**
- **give your own views, based on what you have read, about whether or not handwriting lessons in school are a good idea.**

Base your speech on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words. Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Marks for reading

The task required candidates to consider and evaluate the ideas in both texts and to advise an audience of teachers and parents about whether handwriting lessons should be timetabled for younger students. Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts. Not all candidates addressed the implication in the question that the school in question could either introduce or abandon handwriting lessons and as a result some may have missed the opportunity to argue coherently that handwriting was no longer a skill which was relevant for young people in the modern world. Most responses attempted to reflect the ideas in the explicit ideas texts which were largely in favour of teaching handwriting, thereby not really using the more implicit ideas which required a deeper understanding.

More effective responses here focused carefully on the arguments in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which addressed and evaluated a range of ideas and implications in them. The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised determined the Level and mark awarded for Reading. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, an understanding that older generations may not be included in a society which relied entirely on keyboard communication or, conversely, that just as methods of communication had changed over time, the prevalence of keyboards over handwriting was inevitable. Indeed, some argued that to require students to adopt a difficult and cumbersome method of writing for the sake of tradition was a betrayal of the younger generation. In responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 for Reading, Examiners often rewarded some thoughtful consideration of the other benefits of learning to write by hand beyond simple communication.

In Text A, for example, the suggestion that handwriting was a good 'workout for the brain' was developed in some responses to suggest that younger children's progress in all areas of learning would improve as a result of this stimulation at an early age. In Text B, there was some critique in better responses of the stated benefits of schemes such as the 'pen licence' in so far as having neat handwriting was not so useful a skill in its own right.

Having ideas worth communicating to others was sometimes considered more important than being able to produce neat handwriting and the licence could also foster an unhelpful competitiveness among students who might never be able to write neatly. Others focused on the exclusion of children whose schools and families could not afford the expensive technology required for keyboard learning, suggesting that simple pen and paper would always be needed for many children in the world.

The implications of some of the ideas in both texts concerning the importance of handwriting for a child's identity, individuality and sense of community were often discussed at the higher Levels. The sense of

cultural identity fostered by learning to handwrite in time-honoured ways, as referred to in Text A, was sometimes combined productively with Text B's briefly stated point that the uniqueness of each person's handwriting was preferable to the bland, pre-determined font of a keyboard-generated message. For some, the effort required to handwrite a personal message to a family member was intrinsically more valuable than an email or e-card which could be generated at speed with little effort. The implication that the speed and convenience of keyboards meant that children would be exposed to screens much longer was seen as a danger to their health and may also contribute to a lazy attitude to communication when errors could be corrected automatically without the understanding or intervention of the writer. Many candidates argued that it was unrealistic to expect students to handwrite everything when technology could save time and effort. Some development of this idea was offered in some thoughtful responses where the time saved by taking notes or writing extended texts on keyboards could be better spent on learning more knowledge or more skills.

In Text B, successful responses made better use of the example of innovative methods for teaching handwriting to younger children. Rather than reporting these methods as examples of how handwriting could be taught, these responses focused more closely on the task by considering the wider skills acquired in learning to write by hand, addressing why it should be taught. The early boost of self-confidence afforded children who gained their 'pen licence' as well as the fine motor skills practised were considered benefits in themselves, as was the sense of community fostered by writing personal letters to older people who may not have had access to keyboards.

These kinds of explanations and extensions of the ideas in the texts were more evaluative than a simple opinion or summary and warranted marks in Level 5 or above. However, responses in which a range of such evaluations were made, or ideas in the texts were assimilated to create a highly evaluative critique, were less common and there were relatively few Level 6 responses for Reading.

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Level 4 and lower Level 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the redundancy of handwriting in the workplace or the neurological benefits of teaching children to write by hand in Text A, alongside some of the ideas presented in Text B. Marks in Level 5 were given where some comments amounted to 'some successful evaluation', usually one or two developments or judgements made about the importance of handwriting for wider educational progress or sometimes the concerns about the costs of technology which made handwriting more practical. In some responses, these kinds of comments were enough for Examiners to award a mark in Level 5, providing there was some specificity rather than a vague reflection that handwriting was generally better for a child to learn.

Responses given marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and offered a straightforward summary of the ideas in the texts while not examining those ideas more closely. Examiners also noted that the focus of the comments was more general and less focused on specific ideas, often with some valid but not fully justified opinion that both keyboard and handwritten communication skills would be necessary for children to acquire in school. In some responses at this Level, comments tended to follow closely the organisation and structure of the original texts, sometimes leading to some contradiction. For example, in Text A, evidence was given that there was little need for handwriting in the workplace but in Text B the assertion was made that handwriting skills would be needed for success in students' future lives.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the details. Responses at the lower Levels were also poorly adapted for a speech with awkward references such as 'Text A says that...' which showed some lack of awareness of how speeches are constructed and how the audience addressed should be accommodated. Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them which made it difficult for Examiners to award marks above Level 4.

A small number of less successful responses, given marks below Level 4, were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, where there was little of the candidate's own words in the response which inevitably limited the marks Examiners could award for both Reading and Writing.

Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

The task allowed for a range of appropriate styles and registers for candidates' speeches and different ways to show an understanding of the audience. Across the ability range, an apt, usually quite formal style of standard English allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a 'sometimes effective style' was required. Although not always sustained, many speeches began with a lively introduction which engaged the audience. Quite often at this Level and above, these opening sections included some rhetoric intended to encourage the audience to reflect on their own experience of learning to write: 'Did you endure the constant repetition of single letters on endless papers? Do you realise that children nowadays often know which button on a keyboard to press long before they can write that letter on paper?' Some reflected on their own classroom experience as older students: 'My opinion on this topic is influenced by the need to produce two or three essays every week. How long do you think that would take if I had to write them by hand?'

These openings showed an appropriate understanding of how a younger person could engage the attention of adults interested in education. In other, often effective, responses, the writer adopted the role of a teacher or parent. This sometimes gave a slightly different perspective on some ideas in the texts, such as the sense of achievement and pleasure to be derived from communicating in handwritten form or the dangers of over-reliance on technology in the classroom: 'As teachers we can limit the distractions students have in the classroom but using keyboards to take notes in class gives them access to a whole world of distraction.'

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4 even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, as long as the style and register adopted were appropriate for the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to engage the specific audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, there were many responses which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the style, context and register of a speech, limiting the effectiveness of the response as a whole. In some at this Level, the speech was opened appropriately but the audience seemed quickly forgotten in responses which reported the ideas in the texts with limited acknowledgement of the listeners.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent speech. While most responses, to varying degrees, worked their way through the ideas in the texts, less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience knew or understood and the style showed less awareness of how speeches are delivered.

Structure

As mentioned above, responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. At the highest Level, the ideas in the two texts were addressed but in a cohesive speech with a persuasive purpose rather than a disjointed summary of two quite different texts. The different points for and against the teaching of handwriting, including the more implicit ideas, were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent speech. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than a simple tracking of what each text said.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. Many used the bullet points in the question to help structure their responses, offering some comment on the ideas in each text before closing with some opinion and occasionally some exhortation. Some responses aimed for a rhetorical ending which sometimes worked well: 'Do you really want to bring up a generation that never experienced the creative, fulfilling process of learning to write by hand?' An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording and paraphrase but several phrases were also lifted from the texts.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as appropriate in tone and register was given a mark in Level 6 for Writing. These responses were often engaging and showed a strong awareness of audience but were also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader. Some complex sentences structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the contending views in the texts and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation: 'On the one hand, the cultural identity of young children is bound up in the way handwriting skills are passed down from one generation to another, moulding their experience of tradition and history, but at what cost?'

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Very common misspellings included 'handwritting' and capital letters for countries and languages were often omitted.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. Another limited feature was a simplicity of style, vocabulary and sentence structures. These responses often showed some clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Grammar and agreement errors such as 'this children' or 'childs, tense errors such as 'children had learned to write by hand in some countries' were quite common at this Level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content or the style of the response was the candidate's own. Less rare were responses in which more complex ideas and sentence structures were copied from the texts while the writer's own style was more simple or faulty.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- Be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts.
- Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree.
- Make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.
- Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.
- Think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.
- Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.

Section B

Descriptive writing

Describe a flying object or creature as it takes off, moves through the air and then lands again.

Write a description with the title, 'A moment of stillness' .

Both descriptive writing questions were popular choices for candidates and were interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In the first task, many kinds of flying objects or creatures were included. Birds of many varieties featured but there were also some mythical dragons, fairies, bees and flying insects. Flying objects included planes of many types from small aircraft to military jets taking off from aircraft carriers and helicopters on various different kinds of journeys.

All these interpretations were acceptable and valid, as long as there was a clear link with the question. Most responses followed the task quite closely and this usually helped candidates avoid slipping into too much narrative. Some included more preamble and explanation than description, explaining the purpose and preparation for a flight in a somewhat factual sequence rather than focusing on evoking the sensations and

atmosphere of the experience. However, where the time scale was short and the focus on detail secure, Examiners could award high marks.

While this tendency to narrative was also seen in responses to the second question, the focus on a 'moment' in the task helped many candidates to incorporate the sense impressions of a limited snapshot of time without over-explanation or preamble. The cause or reason for this 'moment of stillness' often became clear through the details selected and the way they were organised but there were many sustained, detailed and effective descriptions in response to this question.

Some effective responses to the first question created an engaging atmosphere from the start as the narrator observed their surroundings. Natural settings were commonly used here, featuring mountains and lakes in which birds or other creatures were observed in their natural habitat. The choice of details and closely observed images in effective descriptions created clear, readily pictured scenes for the reader: 'From the vantage point of a tall tree, the eagle surveyed his domain, the broad sweep of mountains and the wide, cloudless sky, untroubled by the insignificant intrusion of my presence in his kingdom.' In another tranquil setting, the jarring sound of a military aircraft is heard before the aircraft is seen: 'Into this peaceful, serene landscape the phut-phut of a distant helicopter could be heard becoming louder and scattering the hidden creatures of the forest in all directions.' In other descriptions, the focus on the effect of the flying creature or object on the narrator gave the piece its impact: 'The ease with which it rode the thermals, its huge wings barely moving as it swept across the valley, its eyes fixed on the ground far below, made me gasp. The creature had literally stopped my breathing.'

Occasionally, more clichéd details made the description a little less effective or sometimes the images were not quite successful. Adjectives such as 'beautiful', 'peaceful' or birds described being 'as fast as a cheetah chasing its prey' were less effective than those responses which brought the creature or object alive by closely observed detail and striking, unusual images. The most effective descriptions avoided these more general, stereotypical ideas and focused more closely on details and specific moments.

The second question was more often selected than the first and elicited a wide range of scenarios in some highly effective descriptions. Again, there were many natural landscapes in which narrators derived moments of calm and restorative tranquillity. In some, the turmoil in the narrator's mind was hinted at, so that as the description unfolded this sense of restoration became more credible. In some effective responses, however, the 'moment' described was caused by extreme shock or fear. One response was set in a hospital waiting room in the moment bad news about a loved one was given to a shocked and traumatised narrator. The focus on detail here had more impact than a more straightforward attempt to describe strong feelings: 'The nurse was speaking but I couldn't hear her voice. The dripping tap in the basin behind her and the ticking of the clock on the wall filled my senses. There was a little crack on the lens of her glasses. I wondered how she could see properly. Her starched uniform was so clean, her words like knives reaching into my guts.' In another unusual interpretation of the task, the sense of bewilderment and fear after a murder was depicted: 'There was a spreading red stain on the pale carpet. Somewhere from down a long tunnel my mother's disembodied voice screamed over and over. The room began to spin until I slumped to the floor, my eyes falling absent-mindedly on the knife in my hand.'

Level 5 responses to both questions used a wide range of details and were well-constructed, although were less consistently effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but were usually a little more predictable or drifted into narrative.

For Content and Structure, responses given marks in Level 4 tended to become narrative quite quickly, especially in the second question where there was some over-explanation of what had happened before the 'moment of stillness'. In some responses to both questions, overlong preambles often gave way to more specific description though the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed or were simple narratives about trips into forests or flights to holiday destinations. Occasionally at this Level, the difference between narrative and descriptive writing was not well understood. Where responses were largely descriptive at this Level, details were listed and paragraphing was insecure or not used.

High marks for Style and Accuracy reflected a precise and varied vocabulary, used carefully to achieve specific effects, as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, highly rewarded responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to evoke atmosphere and engage the

reader. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres of, for example, tranquillity or chaos. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by imprecise and inappropriate use. More plain, clichéd or repetitive vocabulary was often characteristic of Level 4 marks.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks given in the middle range. In a few responses there were no complete sentences at all. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and fluctuations in tenses which created an awkward style lacking in fluency, even where other elements were accurate, such as spelling or sentence construction.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

- **Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.**
- **Keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.**
- **Write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.**
- **Use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.**

Narrative writing

Write a story that includes the words, ‘... this opportunity was too good to miss ...’.

Write a story with the title, ‘Lost’ .

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range and there was a very wide range of plotlines, characters and scenarios in these responses, based on valid, relevant interpretations of the questions. Similar plotlines were used in many narrative responses such as the opportunity to be selected for a sports team in the first and being lost on a trip of some kind in unfamiliar, often dangerous terrain in the second. The construction and execution of these plots, however, varied considerably in quality. More effective narratives showed a clear understanding of the other aspects of developed story-writing apart from a credible plot, such as well drawn characters, a vivid evocation of setting and a shaping of the narrative to interest and engage the reader, varying the pace to provide moments of drama and tension. Where stories were mostly a series of events told in a simple, chronological sequence, the lack of these elements of a more developed structure tended to limit the marks Examiners could award for Content and Structure.

Effective responses were well organised and often original interpretations of the title. In the first question, responses given higher marks for Content and Structure often revolved around the protagonist’s realisation that, despite the risks, the opportunity which presented itself was irresistible. This sense of jeopardy sometimes involved a chance to win some coveted prize in an underhand or illegal way, such as cheating in an examination, betraying a friend to make some kind of gain or becoming embroiled in some illegal enterprise to make money. One response effectively garnered the reader’s sympathy for a poorly paid, hard-working son whose mother was gravely ill and needed funds for her treatment. The opportunity which could not be missed was the chance to organise a robbery at the home of his employer, involving some advanced computer hacking skills. On being confronted by the employer’s family and unable to go through with plan because of his conscience and the innocence of the employer’s small child, his skills were at last recognised by the employer and properly rewarded, allowing him to relieve his mother’s suffering.

There was some careful characterisation of both protagonist and employer and one or two moments of controlled drama and tension which maintained the emotional investment of the reader in the fate of the characters involved. Other storylines which allowed for some skilful construction included a student about to take a crucial examination, beset by anxiety and fear of an oppressive parent, who accidentally faced being able to have sight of the papers beforehand. The story was constructed interestingly, starting as a memory just as the now-grown protagonist was about to receive an accolade in his profession, with the bullying parent now frail and incapable. The characterisation of these two characters was spare but highly effective. At the beginning, for example, the parent was described as ‘cold, irritated by his son’s nervous prattle at the

breakfast table, anxious to be gone to the shiny palace of his workplace where his employees feared him and were silent.'

There were also some very effective narratives to address the alternative narrative question. The idea of 'Lost' was interpreted in a wide variety of ways, most of which were valid and gave candidates a range of approaches to adopt. There were many literal interpretations where characters got lost on hiking trips in desolate, frightening landscapes, on car journeys, during visits to unfamiliar cities, airports or other busy areas. One scenario which often worked well was for a younger sibling to become detached from a usually bored or irritated older brother or sister and to get lost in a potentially dangerous environment such as a fairground, theme park or shopping centre.

There was often some moral lesson learned by the older sibling in realising how important their family was and while most stories ended with the safe return of the lost child, some bleak outcomes had consequences which were far-reaching for the protagonist. One such tale was told from the vantage point of old age with the narrator looking back, many years later, on a life blighted by losing a younger sibling who never returned. Again, it was often the varied pace and careful use of language to build tension which made these narratives effective and drew the reader in, as well as the care taken over characterisation and setting. The bleak narrative mentioned above, for example, depended on a carefully observed description of the lost little girl for its impact at the end: 'She's still there somewhere, still six years old, spinning around in her new pink dress, licking the chocolate off her little fingers without a care in the world.'

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but cohesive and with some engaging features. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed story, relevant to the task. Responses in this range were usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. There were many which involved mobile phones that didn't work or cars that broke down and where credible characters and settings were created. Examiners could award marks in Level 5. Effective characterisation of the protagonist or narrator was often a factor in Examiners selecting a mark in Level 5 rather than Level 4, especially in responses to the second question where the response was paragraphed and organised but had more of a discursive rather than narrative shape and purpose. While some Level 5 narratives were a little predictable, stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of developed narrative writing. At this Level, stories were often more dependent on a series of events, without the preparation of setting and character to engage the reader. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were often used as those in more effective narratives but these were less effective in engaging the reader. For the 'Lost' question, accidents or breakdowns were just as common but more time and focus were given to relating events than developing credible, rounded characters. In the first question, simple sports stories or academic successes were common, often cohesive overall but with limited development. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 4 and lower were usually simple accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. While there was usually some relevance to the task selected, the plot was either very simple or confusing and characters lacked substance, often appearing only as names, and their motivations and relationships were not outlined. Dialogue was either used very little or, occasionally, too much, with limited storytelling to help the reader make sense of events.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and varied use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects and helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6, though very rarely below this Level. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed Examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent whereas Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range and precision in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors. Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements and some awkward use of prepositions. Occasionally, imprecise and somewhat over-

ambitious vocabulary led to a style which was not lucid or easily understood. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing, limiting the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, was very common in Level 4/low Level 5 writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **Think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.**
- **Consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.**
- **Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on events.**
- **Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.**
- **Choose your vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/23
Directed Writing and Composition

Key messages

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

In order to achieve high marks, candidates were required to:

- use an appropriate form, style and register in both questions
- structure ideas and organise responses effectively to persuade and engage the reader
- produce detailed and evocative descriptions and engaging, credible narratives
- adapt their style and structure for different audiences, purposes and genres
- construct varied sentences accurately, with a clear attempt to influence and interest the reader
- use precise and wide-ranging vocabulary, appropriate for the task and style required

General comments

Examiners found that almost all candidates understood what was required in both questions, Directed Writing and Composition. Nearly all candidates understood the instructions for the examination and attempted **Question 1** and either a descriptive or narrative writing task, although a few candidates only responded to one question on the paper or attempted more than one response in **Section B**. Some responses to descriptive questions wrote more narratively than descriptively and although Examiners credited description wherever possible, some responses showed a clear misunderstanding of how descriptive writing differs from narrative. In **Question 1**, responses were written mostly in candidates' own words, but some were mostly or wholly copied from the texts in the Reading Booklet Insert.

Nearly all responses showed a clear understanding of, and some engagement with, the topic of the reading texts in **Question 1**. Most responses were written in an appropriate style and format for a speech given to a meeting of parents and teachers. There was usually a clear and balanced assessment of the good and bad points concerning the ideas surrounding all-year round schooling. The question stipulated that the conclusion had to be that all-year round schooling 'would not be a good idea' but some responses did not notice this instruction.

Most candidates approached the topic using their own words rather than lifting or copying the words in the passages, although many included short phrases such as 'summer slide' from the texts. More effective answers here also tended to structure responses independently, selecting and commenting on the details in the texts in a coherent response which argued consistently throughout. Effective responses showed some ability to probe and consider in more depth the views given in the texts, suggesting that longer holidays had a range of useful benefits for the students, parents and teachers, as well as challenging the stated benefits claimed for all-year round schooling.

In the middle of the mark range, responses tended to reproduce the points made in the texts, sometimes with a little personal opinion on the positive or negative elements of longer holidays or all-year round schooling or developing and expanding the ideas in the material with some beginnings of evaluation. Development rather than evaluation often tries to simply fix a perceived problem rather than make an evaluative judgement. Suggesting that more homework could be given in the long holidays is an attempt to fix the issues of forgetting academic work and is developing the material not evaluating the matter. A substantial number of responses in this range made some reference to the ideas in the texts, mainly concentrating on students and

parents, without clearly addressing the specific points relevant to 'teachers and the wider community' which was a direction given in the second bullet point of the question.

Less effective responses tended to repeat the ideas in the texts, rather than selecting points and commenting on them. In some responses at this level, this resulted in a lack of cohesion with conflicting viewpoints given side by side. The examples of positive and negative points which were given in the texts tended to be reproduced with limited comment on them. Others produced summaries of what each text said with less secure understanding of how to adapt the ideas in them for a speech aiming to reach a given conclusion. A few responses copied the material word for word, meaning that there was nothing to credit for the candidate's own words or ideas.

For the Writing mark, there was often a clear attempt made to adapt the style and register to reflect the speaker's understanding, views, decisions and awareness of the audience. In most cases, some understanding was shown of how the speech could be structured, developed and delivered to give an opinion, and how rhetoric, persuasion and, when appropriate, humour can be used to engage and persuade the particular audience. The most effective responses paid specific attention to the audience and style required for the task. These were appropriately formal and evaluative in style, using ideas from the texts to create and structure arguments and often employing rhetorical devices such as questions, exclamations and appropriate humour for the given audience of parents and teachers. Most in the middle range of marks wrote in a more straightforward style and there was less focus on scrutinising the ideas in the texts. Less effective responses relied more on the sequence of the points made in the texts with less selection and reordering of ideas from the originals. This sometimes resulted in contradictory statements, weak paragraphing, and less cohesive responses.

In **Section B**, descriptive writing at the highest level was evocative and subtle and most responses gave a range of descriptive detail without resorting to narrative. Many responses to the descriptive writing questions were very engaging and sustained. The idea of 'a journey through, on or over water' was interpreted in a wide variety of ways. Many successful responses described a cruise, ferry, or small boat adventure for example, with some vivid development concerning some varied and atmospheric environments. There were some tense storms and underwater experiences as well. Making the reader feel engaged and present at the scene by using the descriptive elements was a successful approach.

In the second task, the 'group of people celebrating a special occasion' was also varied in content, from birthdays, weddings and graduations to large scale national and religious events. Again, making the reader feel engaged and almost present at the scene was a successful approach. Effective description of these scenes often focused on the thoughts and feelings of the narrator as well as effectively described details of the environment. Some less successful responses to this question were clearly intended as narratives rather than descriptions and Examiners found only limited descriptive content to reward. Less effective responses to both questions tended to become dominated by events or lengthy narrative preambles to set the scene which rather over-balanced the main focus of the task. In both questions, descriptions were more effective when there was specific detail and where the description created an atmosphere which evoked the scene credibly and with engagement. Less effective responses to both descriptive writing questions were characterised by a lack of descriptive detail and a tendency to become narrative.

The best narrative writing engaged the reader with well-drawn and interesting characters and scenarios which were effectively developed and structured. Both narrative questions elicited a very wide range of approaches and Examiners awarded marks in all Levels here. Effective and engaging responses to the first question presented some situations where the 'loss of confidence or belief' led to some soul searching, deep thought and disappointment, or at times it could lead to a positive and uplifting change and resolution. The second narrative question elicited responses with many interpretations using the one-word title 'Leaving'. Leaving home and breaking relationships were the most popular of a very wide range of options. Less effective responses focused on rather ordinary series of events or mundane scenarios with less sense of narrative progression and development.

In some descriptive and narrative writing responses, a few candidates appeared to be using a prepared story which seemed imposed upon the task and not always relevant to it.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Imagine that you are a student at another school in the same district as Champion School. Your school is considering whether to follow the same plan as Champion School or not.

Write a speech to give to a meeting of parents and teachers from your school about why all-year round schooling would not be a good idea.

In your speech you should:

- **evaluate the ideas, attitudes and opinions about all-year round schooling given in the texts**
- **explain your concerns about changing to all-year round schooling and how it would affect parents, teachers and the wider community.**

Base your speech on what you have read in both texts, but be careful to use your own words.

Address both of the bullet points.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.

Marks for reading

The task required candidates to consider and evaluate the ideas in both texts and to present a clear view in a speech about why all-year round schooling would not be a good idea for that student's school. Examiners awarded high marks for Reading where there was some probing and evaluation of the ideas in the reading material, rather than a straightforward listing and reproduction of the points in the texts.

More effective responses focused carefully on the points and ideas in the texts, with the highest marks awarded for those which addressed and evaluated the most salient ideas about the given attitudes and opinions about all-year round schooling and the speaker's concerns about the proposed changes, while considering the effects on parents, teachers and the wider community. Many also considered the values and purposes of the current longer school holidays and termly structure. More successful responses explored and challenged the texts' ideas with assertions, for example, that longer holidays allow family relationships to thrive and develop rather than being a time of strain and tension as the material suggested. While evaluation was accessible across the range of responses, again, those more successful in both reading and writing tended to structure the speech by discussing the points throughout the response rather than listing them and then offering an evaluative or developed conclusion. In Reading this fosters a wider range of development or evaluation and, in Writing, more opportunities to write with greater fluency and complexity.

The extent to which the implicit ideas and opinions contained in the texts were probed and scrutinised determined the Level and mark awarded for Reading. These implicit ideas often involved, for example, a wide range of the suggested benefits and the value of these statements, specifically for stressed students, busy parents and overworked teachers. In responses given marks in Level 5 and 6 for Reading, Examiners often rewarded some more thoughtful consideration of the ideas in the Texts. In Text A, for example, that having more contact time in school with shorter breaks would put the teacher/student relationship under more pressure rather than 'improving working relationships' as Text A suggested. In Text B, the concerns about the longer holidays were evaluated, judging that in fact they allowed students to make progress in many worthwhile ways other than the academic, with social skills, job experience and cultural visits being used as examples; as well as considering the mental health benefits that the longer holidays provide and relating them clearly and directly to the parties concerned.

It was possible to unpick and evaluate the sustained range of ideas against 'lengthy summer breaks' and reconsider the level of 'success' that 'all-year round schooling' was stated to have achieved in Text A to be awarded marks in Level 5 and 6. Evaluating the values of the longer holidays, or questioning the success of the new scheme if applied to different environments, was useful when using Text A.

In Text B, more effective responses evaluated the comments of the parent/teacher referred to in the passage, considering the effects of the newly proposed termly structure on the teachers and parents. They might also consider the fact that shorter breaks would take away the time needed to develop closer relationships through shared experiences such as those suggested in Text B.

These and other ideas in Text A and Text B required some probing, rather than summarising, for marks in the higher Levels.

These kinds of explanations and extensions of the ideas in the texts were more evaluative than a simple opinion or summary and warranted marks in Level 5 or above. However, responses in which a range of such evaluations were made, or ideas in the texts were assimilated to create a highly evaluative critique were less common and there were few Level 6 responses for Reading.

Responses given marks in the middle range – in Level 4 and lower Level 5 – tended to be more straightforward, with some reflection and comment on the value or otherwise of lengthy holidays and all-year round schooling. Marks in Level 5 were given where some comments amounted to ‘some successful evaluation’. Most common here were briefly stated concerns about the students’ ‘mental health’ if there were to be shorter breaks, or the students’ lack of time to undertake their own choices of hobbies and leisure activity. In some responses, these kinds of comments were enough for Examiners to award a mark in Level 5.

Responses given marks in Level 4 often showed an understanding of the main ideas in the texts and often offered a straightforward summary of the ideas in the texts while not examining those ideas more closely. Examiners also noted that the focus of the comments was more general and missed some of the implications of the ideas in the texts. In Text A, for example, the comments made by the author that it was only ‘some’ success, or that the issues in the final paragraph concerning ‘other schools’ were not really dealt with by the author of ‘No more long school holidays’, were accepted without any consideration or counter argument. In Text B, there was some general reproduction of the ideas without clearly making points focusing on the fact that this was written by a parent and mainly dealt with parents and a teacher.

Where candidates reproduced the points made in both texts, there was at this level less consideration of how and why all-year round schooling would not currently be an appropriate choice.

Less effective responses showed some understanding of the ideas in the passage but there was reference to a narrow range of points or there was some misunderstanding of the task. Some responses had not noticed the clear statement that the speech was to reach the conclusion that ‘all-year round schooling would not be a good idea’. Some responses showed some misunderstanding, for example, of the need to ‘explain your concerns’ and largely explained that the texts had been read by the speaker and then summarised what the two Texts said. Weaknesses in organising ideas coherently were characteristic of responses in the lower levels. The sequence and organisation of ideas often reflected closely the order of ideas in the texts, and this sometimes resulted in contradictory or disconnected responses. Responses at this level were also less secure in their register for the given audience of parents and teachers from a school. Ideas were sometimes summarised with very limited conclusions or comments on them, which made it difficult for Examiners to award marks above Level 4.

A small number of less successful responses, given marks in lower Levels, were almost totally reliant on lifting or copying from the texts, where there were few of the candidate’s own words in the response and the task was not understood.

Marks for writing

25 marks were available for style and register, the structure of the answer and the technical accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Style and audience

The audience was clearly stated to be ‘parents and teachers from your school’ and therefore the appropriate register was one which was relatively formal in tone. Across the ability range, an apt, reasonably formal style of standard English allowed for Examiners to consider marks for Level 4 and above where a ‘sometimes effective style’ was required. Although not always sustained, many speeches began with a lively introduction which directly addressed the audience and engaged the reader.

A sustained and appropriate register for this audience, avoiding summary and staying fully focused on the fact that this was a speech at a meeting, led to marks in Level 5 and above.

In the middle range of marks, Examiners could sometimes award marks in Level 4, even where more technical writing skills were lacking and suggested a Level 3 mark, if the style and register adopted were appropriate, sustained and clearly focused on the task and the audience. A clear, consistent attempt to

engage the specific audience rather than summarise the content of the texts in a straightforward way could sometimes compensate for other elements of style such as weak spelling or insecure grammar. Conversely, there were many responses which were accurate in the main but showed little adaptation of style from the original texts to suit the appropriate style, context and register, limiting the effectiveness of the response as a whole.

Level 3 marks were usually awarded where the reading material was largely reproduced so that the organisation and sequence of sentences and paragraphs reflected the original and were not adapted to create a coherent speech. While most responses to varying degrees worked their way through the ideas in the texts, less effective responses tended to refer to the texts as Text A and B with limited grasp of what the intended audience knew or understood and the style showed less awareness of how concerns are delivered. A few responses seemed to be only loosely based on the reading material and gave a personal view rather than a speech giving an opinion on what had been read and expressing concerns. A few referred almost exclusively to only one of the texts

Structure

As mentioned above, responses awarded high marks for Writing handled the material confidently and presented their arguments cogently. The issues addressed were combined so that the judgements which emerged was clearly derived from the ideas in the texts but the response was not dependent on them for its structure and sequence. At the highest level, the issues in the two texts were addressed but as a sustained piece with a clear purpose rather than a disjointed summary of two quite different texts. The central consideration about all-year round schooling was grasped from the start and the ideas in the texts were organised as arguments and counterarguments in a coherent whole. The argument being pursued determined the sequence of ideas in these responses rather than the sequence of the original texts. Candidates consistently adhered to and sustained the correct register for the task.

Responses given Level 5 marks for Writing tended to reflect a range of points made in each text but were reordered in a response which was sensibly structured and paragraphed. This often avoided the clashing of contradictory points from each text. Many used the bullet points in the question to help structure their responses, offering some comment on the ideas in each text before closing with some well-expressed personal opinions and concerns. An overall coherence and structure were required for this Level which was usually less evident in responses below Level 5.

Less effective responses sometimes struggled to provide a coherent argument and were more tied to the sequencing of the texts. In most cases the information given in the texts was offered with some rewording or some phrases were lifted from the texts. A few relied entirely on the reading material and simply copied it out.

Accuracy

Accomplished writing which was accurate and controlled as well as highly effective and sustained in tone and register was given a writing mark in Level 6 for Writing. These responses were often engaging and showed a strong awareness of audience but were also fluent and virtually free of error. There was a range of precisely selected and complex vocabulary and sentence structures were varied and were consciously used, often rhetorically, to engage the reader. Some responses began their points with complex sentences to include their selections, for example, 'However, all-year round schooling is not as perfect and flawless as some have claimed, and there are a number of concerns that will need to be raised.' Writing was often ambitious and, when delivered with some success, could mitigate for some awkwardness or other errors.

Some complex sentence structures were chosen which conveyed with some subtlety the views in the texts and complex clauses were controlled by careful punctuation.

Level 5 responses were usually purposeful and clear, though perhaps not as ambitious and wide ranging in vocabulary or as precise in register or style as those given higher marks. Level 4 responses, as described in the marking guidelines, were 'sometimes effective' but not consistently so. Although the style was usually plain, the language used was apt and generally accurate. A range of quite basic errors was made at this level which limited the effectiveness of the style but did not affect clarity of meaning. Common misspellings at this level included some words from the texts, such as 'benifit' or 'assesments', and the incorrect use of homophones.

Faulty sentence structures, fluctuating tense use or too much lifted or copied material often kept writing marks for **Question 1** below Level 4. These responses often showed reasonable clarity in conveying meaning but there was a wide range of quite basic punctuation and grammar errors which meant that Examiners could not award marks in Level 4. Tense errors such as 'Teachers needs breaks' and 'some parents may asked' and agreement errors such as 'this activities' were more frequent and more damaging to meaning at this level. In rare cases, material from the texts was so extensively copied that responses could not be given marks in Band 4 for Writing or for Reading because neither the content nor the style of the response were the candidate's own.

Ways in which this type of answer could be improved:

- **Be prepared to challenge the ideas in the reading texts. Always justify and explain the reasons why you agree or disagree as this shows evidence of evaluation.**
- **Make sure the ideas you use are derived from the passage.**
- **Aim for breadth of coverage of the ideas in the passage as well some depth in evaluating them.**
- **Think carefully about the kind of style which suits your task and the audience.**
- **Check your writing for basic punctuation errors, such as missing definite or indefinite articles, weaknesses in grammar or misspellings of key words which are in the passage.**

Section B

Descriptive Writing

Question 2 – Describe a journey through, on or over water.

Question 3 – Describe a group of people celebrating a special occasion.

Both descriptive writing questions were chosen by candidates and were interpreted in a wide variety of ways. In the first task, many kinds of 'journey through, on or over water' were included, from busy ferry crossings, sea cruises and crossing by air, to quiet river journeys and underwater explorations. Times of danger were described at times, and there were exciting encounters with underwater wildlife and some thoughtful contemplation and meditation on what had been witnessed. All these interpretations were acceptable and valid, as long as there was a clear link with the question. Occasionally, the preamble to travelling to the setting for the journey tended to overshadow with narrative the description of the surroundings but where the time scale was short and the focus on detail secure, Examiners could, and did, award some very high marks.

This tendency to write as a narrative happened at times in both responses, although the Examiners could usually find relevant description of thoughts, feelings and setting.

For the second question, there were some effective responses which evoked the atmosphere and setting for a 'special occasion'. Some of the descriptions were quite similar in content, with exciting birthdays and concerns over examination results day being very popular. Most responses did have a clear and relevant focus on the title. There were some lengthy and less successful preambles and descriptions of waking up, showering, having breakfast and then travelling to the 'special occasion', which finally became the focus of the description.

The first question was more often selected than the second (20.7 per cent of candidates chose the first question as opposed to 14.2 per cent for the second descriptive title) and for some candidates this title proved a good vehicle to show their descriptive skills. Some effective responses to this question created an engaging atmosphere from the start as the narrator observed their surroundings, the means of transport and the others involved in the journey. As so often in descriptive writing, the choice of details and closely observed images helped to conjure a sense of place. It was not always about the beauty and wonder of nature, one effective response was centred around a makeshift gangplank across murky waters onto a slimy and mossy unfit craft and the response continued to develop this atmosphere in a sustained and effective way. Some journeys were seen as full of different characters and creatures, effectively brought to life in their particular environment. Where the descriptive focus was sustained and the details given precise and concrete, Examiners awarded high marks for Content and Structure.

There was a tendency in some responses for some slightly clichéd or stereotypical details, especially in descriptions of shark attacks and encounters with dolphins.

The second question was the less popular descriptive title and the open nature of the title left room for a wide variety of interpretations. There was a clear opportunity to develop and sustain feelings, mood and atmosphere with a variety of focus and standpoint. Some responses did contain narrative elements as mentioned above, but a relevant descriptive focus was usually maintained. Examples of successful responses include a group celebrating New Year in Times Square in the year 1999, and an elderly relative's birthday with family reminiscences and memories being evocatively described. Several responses focused almost entirely on the variety of food at the special occasion and neglected the range of descriptive detail that could have been generated by this title.

Level 6 and 5 responses to both questions used a wide range of details and were well-constructed, remaining consistently effective and cohesive overall. At the bottom of Level 5 and in Level 4, responses were sustained and competently organised but were usually a little more predictable or began to drift into narrative.

For Content and Structure, responses given marks in Level 4 tended to become narrative quite quickly, with the narrator taking a long time waking up, having breakfast and then a journey to the location that was meant to be the main descriptive concern. In some responses to both questions, overlong preambles often gave way to more specific description, though the description sometimes became a more straightforward list of what was seen and heard. The descriptive content tended to be a little more stereotypical or general than responses given higher marks.

Less effective responses given marks in Level 3 or below often included less well organised lists of details briefly given rather than developed or were simple narratives about a sea trip or a birthday party.

Responses which had little descriptive content were more frequently submitted for the second question than the first and occasionally there was evidence that the difference between narrative and descriptive writing was not well understood. Where responses were largely descriptive at this level, details were listed and paragraphing was insecure or not used.

High marks for Style and Accuracy reflected the precise and varied vocabulary, used carefully to achieve specific effects, as well as the technical accuracy of the writing. In both descriptive tasks, highly rewarded responses had a much wider range of vocabulary, precisely deployed to evoke atmosphere and engage the reader. Highly effective responses showed an ability to use both simple and complex language and sentence structures to create subtle, complex atmospheres of, for example, tranquillity or reflection. In less effective responses, vocabulary was sometimes wide-ranging and complex but used with less precision. In a few cases, this insecure use of language resulted in a style which was difficult to follow and the credit which could be given for a wide-ranging vocabulary was lost by imprecise and inappropriate use. Very straightforward, clichéd or repetitive vocabulary was often characteristic of Level 4 marks.

As is often the case in less secure descriptive writing, tenses switched between past and present, sometimes within sentences. Incomplete or verbless sentences also affected marks given in the middle range, although this error was less evident than in previous series. Recurring issues included insecure tenses and the use of sentence fragments. Although sentence fragments may be acceptable at the beginning of a description when the candidate is perhaps attempting to use this for effect, the continued use throughout indicates an insecurity in sentence structure. Lapses in grammar, perhaps minor in isolation but more damaging when persistent, also kept responses out of Level 4 for Style and Accuracy. These included disagreement, especially between pronouns and verbs, and fluctuations in tenses which created an awkward style lacking in fluency, even where other elements were accurate, such as spelling or sentence construction.

Ways in which the writing of descriptions can be improved

- **Try to avoid clichéd scenarios and consider a more individual and original selection of content. Choose a scenario which gives you a range of details on which to focus.**
- **Keep your focus on details which will help you evoke a particular atmosphere.**
- **Write sentences with proper verbs and do not switch tenses.**
- **Use vocabulary precisely: complex words used wrongly do not help your style.**

Narrative Writing

Question 4 – Write a story that involves a loss of confidence or belief.

Question 5 – Write a story with the title ‘Leaving’.

Both narrative writing questions were popular choices for candidates across the mark range (28.5% of candidates attempted the first narrative title, with 36.6% attempting the second narrative title) and there was a very wide range of plotlines, characters and scenarios in these responses, based on valid interpretations of the questions. Both titles were effective in enabling candidates to relevantly engage in a clearly narrative genre. Effective responses were well organised and often original interpretations of the title which used engaging ideas to create managed and developed stories. An ability to shape the narrative, to produce moments of tension or drama, to vary the pace of the story and create well-rounded characters were elements of the ‘features of fiction writing’ credited by Examiners.

In the first question, responses given higher marks for Content and Structure often revolved around a development of tension centred around the loss of confidence or belief. In many cases there were personal difficulties faced by an individual that led to an event which brought matters into question. There were times of doubt concerning personal attributes or abilities or worries about physical or mental strength and agility. Several responses used the idea of a loss of confidence in sporting prowess or doubts as the examinations approached. Reflections caused by a loss of confidence attributed to the effects of social media was another popular choice. At times the ‘belief’ of the title was a faith and trust in other people that was being tried and tested. At all levels of achievement, worried individuals experienced various concerns that could only be settled by some deep thought and consideration. Effective and well-drawn characters made the outcome of these stories more poignant and engaging. One response turned a trusting and loving relationship on its head as gradually and piece by piece, the true character of a partner was revealed, and confidence and beliefs were shattered. Without a careful setting of scene and effective characterisation the overall impact of the narratives would have been greatly reduced.

There were also some very effective responses to address the second narrative question. The open suggestion of ‘Leaving’ led to many relevant and effective interpretations, not just effective narratives dealing with leaving home, school or a friend but also well managed emotive narratives dealing with a tragic loss. All interpretations which were valid gave candidates a range of approaches to adopt as a first person character or a third person narrator. Relationships that had reached a pivotal point, a personal revelation of some kind, the truths that needed to be told at the point of leaving were all relevant approaches. Again, effective scene-setting and characterisation were crucial in giving the narrative credibility and shape. For some candidates, the question title lent itself to a more complex narrative structure than a straightforward chronological account and resulted sometimes in a more engaging story as a result. The sense of looking back at the arc of the story, realising how the event that led to the crisis point of leaving had been reached, gave some responses an interesting narrative structure. A young person looking back over his parents’ difficulties and realising that things had reached the crunch point was one successful approach.

Narratives given marks in the highest Level for Content and Structure had to have a clarity of structure which was confident and secure in its approach, where the reader felt that the development was controlled and focused with effective use of the ‘features of fiction’ as mentioned above.

Narratives given marks in Level 5 were usually more straightforward in structure and approach but cohesive and with some engaging features. Examiners could award marks in Level 5 for Content and Structure where the narrative was organised and there was a clear attempt to create a developed story which was relevant to the task. Responses in this range were usually chronological accounts but were cohesive and balanced and contained a suitable ending depicting some resolution. Here, Examiners could award marks in Level 5. Effective characterisation of the protagonist or narrator was often a factor in Examiners selecting a mark in Level 5 rather than Level 4, especially in responses where the response was paragraphed and organised. While some Level 5 narratives were a little predictable, stories needed to be well-managed with some conscious shaping of the narrative beyond a simple retelling of events.

Level 4 marks for Content and Structure were awarded for stories which were relevant to the task but were less developed and used fewer elements of developed narrative writing. At this level, stories were often more dependent on a series of events, without the preparation of setting and character to engage the reader. A simplicity of content or a lack of development rather than weaknesses in organisation were typical at this level. Similar plots and scenarios were often used as those in more effective narratives but the narratives were less effective in engaging the reader. For **Question 4**, doubts and personal crises were just as common but at this level more time and focus were given to relating events than developing credible,

rounded characters. In the second question, straightforward crime or horror stories were common, often cohesive overall but with limited development. While most less effective narratives had some simple but clear sequence of events, there were fewer features of a developed narrative and the reader was less engaged as a result.

Responses given marks in Level 5 and lower were usually very straightforward accounts of events and showed limited awareness of the reader or the features of narrative writing which elevate an account into a developed story. While there was usually some relevance to the task selected, the plot was either very simple or confusing and characters lacked substance, often appearing only as names. Dialogue was either used very little or, occasionally, too much, with limited storytelling to help the reader make sense of events. Occasionally, responses at this level were pre-prepared stories, or stories from revision websites which had limited relevance to the question set. Responses which seemed to be based on questions set in previous examinations were also limited in relevance or were awkwardly adapted, limiting the mark Examiners could award for Content and Structure.

High marks for Style and Accuracy were given for responses where the writing was engaging and varied in vocabulary and where different sentence structures were controlled and used to create particular effects. The characteristics of Level 6 writing included a fluent and flexible use of language which was subtle enough to create a range of effects which helped to engage the reader. Punctuation within sentences, especially in the use of dialogue, was secure in responses in Level 6. A sophisticated and precise range of vocabulary allowed Examiners to consider the highest marks for Style and Accuracy. Responses awarded marks in Level 5 tended to be less ambitious and complex but still mostly accurate and largely fluent whereas Level 4 responses were plain in style and lacked some range and precision in vocabulary. At this level, the writing had few serious errors which affected the clarity of meaning, such as weak sentence control, sentence separation and grammar errors.

Quite common errors of grammar and expression appeared increasingly in responses given low Level 5 and Level 4 responses, such as misagreements and some awkward use of prepositions. There was, however, less evidence of over-ambitious, imprecise vocabulary than Examiners noted in previous series. Errors in sentence control and separation, as well as lapses in tenses, limited otherwise competently told stories to Level 4, as did frequent errors in basic punctuation or grammar. The incorrect use of participles or errors in grammatical agreement contributed to a lack of fluency and accuracy which kept many responses out of Level 5. Similarly, basic punctuation errors and the misspelling of simple words and wrongly selected homophones sometimes appeared in otherwise competent writing, limiting the mark for Style and Accuracy. Weak demarcation of sentences, most commonly the use of commas where full stops were needed, was a common weakness in Level 4 / low Level 5 writing.

Ways in which the writing of narratives can be improved:

- **Think about how to interest and intrigue the reader in shaping your narrative.**
- **Consider imaginative ways to tell your story, apart from a chronological account.**
- **Characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage your reader. Do not rely on events.**
- **Check your writing for errors which will badly affect your mark, such as basic spelling and punctuation mistakes.**
- **Choose your vocabulary with precision and consider the power of simple words and sentences to create particular effects.**

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/03
Coursework Portfolio

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- adapted their writing style to demonstrate an understanding of the needs of different audiences and context for each of the three assignments
- read critically and thoroughly evaluated the implicit and explicit ideas, opinions, and attitudes they identified in a text in Assignment 1
- assimilated ideas from a text to provide developed, thoughtful and sophisticated responses in Assignment 1
- supported their analysis, evaluation and comments with a detailed and specific selection of relevant ideas from a text in Assignment 1
- wrote original and interesting responses which reflected their personal ideas, feelings and interpretations of events and situations
- wrote with confidence using a wide range of vocabulary with precision and for specific effect in all assignments
- sequenced sentences within paragraphs in a way which maintained clarity of arguments, description, or narrative
- demonstrated a high level of accuracy in their writing
- engaged in a process of careful editing and proofreading to identify and correct errors in their writing.

The best practice for the production and presentation of coursework portfolios was when:

- centres followed the guidelines and instructions set out in the Course syllabus and the Coursework Handbook
- a wide range of appropriate texts were used for Assignment 1, which contained ideas and opinions to which candidates could respond, and were relevant to their interests
- centres set a range of appropriately challenging tasks which allowed candidates to respond individually and originally to topics and subjects they were interested in, or of which they had personal knowledge or experience
- teachers gave general advice for improvement at the end of the first drafts
- following feedback, candidates revised and edited their first drafts to improve their writing
- candidates checked, revised, and edited their final drafts to identify and correct errors
- teachers provided marks and summative comments at the end of the final draft of each assignment which clearly related to the appropriate mark level descriptors
- teachers indicated all errors in the final drafts of each completed assignment
- centres engaged in a process of internal moderation and clearly indicated any mark adjustments in the coursework portfolios, on the Individual Record Cards, and on the Candidate Assessment Summary Forms.

General comments

A significant number of candidates produced interesting coursework portfolios which contained varied work across a range of contexts. There was evidence to show that many centres set tasks which allowed candidates flexibility to respond to subjects related to their personal interests or experiences. The majority of coursework portfolios contained writing of three different genres. There were very few incomplete folders seen by moderators.

Moderators reported an improvement in the number of centres following the instructions in the coursework handbook and in this session most centres provided the correct paperwork and completed all relevant forms accurately. The Moderation Team reported that many centres provided summative comments closely related to the mark schemes at the end of each completed assignment. These were extremely helpful in helping moderators to understand how and why marks had been awarded and centres are thanked for following the process as instructed in the Coursework Handbook.

The major concern for all moderators was that some markers of the coursework portfolios did not indicate errors in the final draft of each assignment and/or provide a summative comment which referred to the marking level descriptors to justify the marks awarded. Some folders had no teacher annotation or marks on the assignments at all. Failure to follow this process often resulted in inaccurate or inconsistent marking and was one of the main reasons for adjustment of marks by moderators.

Administration

Successful administration was when centres:

- indicated all errors in the final draft of each assignment
- carried out a thorough process of internal moderation which was clearly signposted on the assignments themselves as well as on all relevant documentation
- supplied marks and specific comments relating to the mark schemes at the end of the final draft of each assignment
- accurately completed the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF) and ICRC, including any amendments made during internal moderation
- ensured that each coursework folder was stapled or tagged and securely attached to the Individual Candidate Record Card (ICRC)
- submitted their sample of coursework folders without using plastic or cardboard wallets.

Internal Moderation

Centres who followed the instructions for carrying out internal moderation as directed in the Coursework Handbook are thanked for engaging in this important process. There was a general trend of greater accuracy of marking by centres where there was clear evidence of internal moderation than centres where no internal moderation process was evident on the coursework folders and documentation.

Some centres did not record changes made at internal moderation on the candidates' Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRCs) which caused some confusion about the final mark awarded to candidates. Centres are requested to ensure that any changes made at internal moderation are signposted clearly on the work itself then also recorded on the ICRC as well as on the Coursework Assessment Summary Form (CASF). This is essential to ensure that the correct marks are recorded for all candidates.

Using the coursework handbook

A cause of concern for all moderators was that some issues persist even though there are clear instructions in the Coursework Handbook, and the same concerns have been raised in previous Principal Moderator Reports. To ensure effective and accurate marking is achieved, and that all paperwork arrives safely for moderation, it is essential that all the instructions given in the Coursework Handbook, and on the relevant forms, are carefully followed. In future sessions centres will be required to complete a checklist and include it with the sample.

Below highlights the three most significant issues related to the administration and annotation of candidates' work which led to mark adjustments by moderators:

1 Indicating all errors in the final version of each assignment

- Some of the assignments showed little or no evidence of complying with the instruction in the Coursework Handbook that markers should indicate all errors in the final draft of each assignment. This process helps markers to effectively and accurately evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of work and to apply the most appropriate 'best fit' mark from the mark scheme. If this process does not take place, it is difficult for markers to make a balanced judgement. In several centres there was evidence across all three assignments that markers had awarded marks from the higher levels of the assessment criteria to work containing frequent, and often serious, errors that had not been annotated

by the marker. This inevitably led to a downward adjustment of marks by the moderator. It is important for all who mark the coursework portfolios to fully understand the importance of indicating and taking into account all errors in the final draft of each assignment. To avoid adjustment of marks for accuracy, it is essential that centres engage in this process and clearly indicate errors in their candidates' work.

2 Individual Candidate Record Cards (ICRC)

- Some centres did not attach the portfolios of work to the ICRC in accordance with the instructions in the Coursework Handbook and point 4 on the electronic version of the ICRC (although this was a smaller number than in previous sessions).
- Some confusion was caused when a small number of centres included ICRCs for the whole cohort as well as the ICRCs for the sample sent; centres only need to send the ICRCs (securely attached to the coursework portfolio) for the candidates in the sample submitted for moderation.
- On some folders there were errors in the transcription of internally moderated mark changes, or it was unclear which mark was the final one. Where internal moderation has taken place, any mark changes should be transferred from the assignment to the ICRC to ensure that the moderator has a clear understanding of all mark changes.

3 Coursework portfolios

- A significant number of centres did not collate the individual assignments into complete coursework portfolios but instead placed loose pages of work into the grey plastic envelopes and despatched them to Cambridge; this caused moderators some difficulties when assembling the coursework folders and delayed the moderation process. Centres should secure each individual coursework folder using tags or staples with the ICRC securely fastened as a cover sheet.
- Moderators reported that several centres used plastic or cardboard wallets to present candidates' work as an alternative to securely attaching the individual assignments to the ICRC; this caused extra work for moderators and increased the risk of work being mislaid. Centres are requested not to place coursework folders into plastic or cardboard wallets.
- Some centres included more than one rough draft; this is unnecessary and can lead to confusion. Please ensure that the rough draft included is clearly labelled as a draft.
- Occasionally rough drafts contained annotations and specific feedback; centres are reminded that when markers offer feedback on rough draft, it should be general advice. No errors should be indicated, and the marker should not offer corrections or improvements. Overmarking of rough drafts can be raised as malpractice by moderators.
- Some centres included documentation not required for the moderation process; the only paperwork that should be included in the sample is clearly indicated in the Coursework Handbook. There will also be a checklist for future submissions which centres should complete and include with their coursework sample.

Comments on specific assignments:

Assignment 1

Candidates were successful when:

- they responded to interesting texts which contained engaging content
- they demonstrated analysis and evaluation of the individual ideas and opinions identified within a text
- the form, purpose and intended audience of their writing was clear to the reader
- they wrote in a fluent, accurate and appropriate style.

Moderators commented that many candidates responded to texts which were of an appropriate length and challenge and which appealed to the interests of the candidates. Successful texts included articles exploring issues relevant to young people, for example, the growth of online learning during the Covid pandemic, feminism, social media, the pros and cons of having tattoos, national issues in the candidates' own countries, and environmental issues. Less successful texts were those which were old and outdated or were of limited personal interest to the candidates. Texts selected for **Assignment 1** should be an appropriate length, explore ideas and offer opinions, and use rhetorical or literary devices designed to provoke or sustain the reader's interest to ensure that the text offers scope for candidates to fully engage and respond to it in a sustained piece of writing. Centres are encouraged to use a good range of relevant and up-to-date texts for **Assignment 1**. Other less successful texts were ones where the candidate fully endorsed the writer's views

and opinions because they offered few opportunities for evaluating ideas and opinions, as required by the mark scheme. It is also crucial to select texts for their quality of written communication: moderators reported seeing a number of poorly written texts taken from a variety of websites. Many of these were too long and tended to be informative, offering very little scope for rigorous evaluation or analysis. Moderators also reported seeing texts which contained potentially offensive or disturbing material despite this being mentioned in previous reports. This may indicate that candidates were allowed to make their own text choices, but centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to ensure that all texts used for Assignment 1 are fit for purpose, and this includes avoiding offensive or unsuitable material. Disagreeing with completely unreasonable or offensive viewpoints also provides fewer opportunities for rigorous evaluation and can be far less challenging for able candidates.

Some centres set one text for a class or sometimes whole cohort. When this approach was adopted by a centre there was usually a tendency for candidates to produce responses which were very similar in content and structure due to heavy scaffolding. This made it difficult for candidates to create the original and sophisticated responses expected of the higher-level assessment criteria and was sometimes a reason for adjustments of marks. Centres are advised that teaching a text to a whole class and offering a scaffolded plan for the response may be a useful teaching strategy for initially developing the necessary skills and knowledge for Assignment 1, but this approach should not be used for the final coursework submission.

If centres are unsure about how to approach and set tasks for **Assignment 1**, they can refer to the Course Syllabus and the Coursework Handbook. Both documents provide advice and guidance about task setting and text selection and can be found on the School Support Hub via the main Cambridge website.

Reading

Although some centres were accurate with their marking of reading, as in the previous moderation sessions, there was a significant trend for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria. Candidates who successfully met the higher-level assessment criteria were those who demonstrated a consistently evaluative approach to most of the ideas and opinions in a text, and provided a developed, sophisticated response which made direct reference or included quotes from the text. Candidates who engaged in a general discussion about the topic or subject of a text, or those who did not thoroughly evaluate a text, tended to produce work which more appropriately met the Level 4 assessment criteria in Table B (reading). The most common reasons for adjustments to a centre's marks for reading were when moderators identified a trend of candidates engaging in a general discussion about the topic of a text/s, or when the number of points covered were 'appropriate' rather than 'thorough'.

Writing

Many candidates responded to texts in an appropriate form and style. Letters were the most popular choice of form, and many candidates demonstrated some understanding of audience and purpose. When candidates were less successful with writing, it was often because the form, intended audience and purpose of the writing was not clear. This made it difficult for the candidates to meet the highest-level assessment criteria and was a reason for adjustments to writing marks for **Assignment 1**. Successful responses to Assignment 1 tasks were those in which the writing was highly effective, almost always accurate, and consistent throughout in the application of form and style. Work which showed insecurity with form and style, such as the omission of an appropriate ending to a letter, a limited or inconsistent use of rhetorical devices for speeches, or lack of clarity of the intended audience, tended to meet the assessment criteria for Level 5 or below, Table A (writing) or below. The moderators noted that there was a general tendency for many centres to award marks from the highest-level assessment criteria to work which more appropriately met the lower-level assessment criteria.

Another common reason for the adjustment of marks for writing was because of the accuracy of the candidates' writing. When errors impaired meaning, such as the incorrect construction of sentences or use of grammar, typing errors, or the incorrect selection of words from spellcheck, the overall quality and efficacy of the discussion was affected. Errors such as these are classed as serious and make it difficult for candidates to meet the higher-level assessment criteria; this type of writing is more characteristic of writing achieving marks from the middle to the lower levels of the assessment criteria. Moderators also noted a tendency for centres to over-reward vocabulary that had some merit in its selection but was not always used precisely or effectively in the response.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 1:

- thoroughly explore, challenge, and discuss the ideas in the text
- avoid making general comments about the topic or subject of the text, instead, ensure that comments are specifically related to the ideas, opinions or attitudes identified in the text
- look for, and use inferences made implicitly in the text
- look for contradictions or misleading assumptions in the text and comment on them
- develop points to create a thorough, detailed, and clear line of argument or discussion
- make sure that the audience and purpose is clear and adapt the written style accordingly
- proof-read assignments to ensure punctuation, vocabulary choices and grammar are correct.

Assignment 2 (description)

The majority of tasks set for **Assignment 2** were appropriate and encouraged candidates to write in a descriptive style. Many students wrote engaging and vivid descriptions from experience or their imaginations, which were a pleasure to read. Moderators also noticed that there were relatively fewer descriptions which slipped into narrative than in previous sessions, but this is still a regularly observed flaw in descriptive writing assignments, sometimes due to the nature of the tasks set. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which invited candidates to describe an experience or trip which tended to lead to tasks more suited to narrative writing. Centres are reminded to set descriptive tasks and remind candidates to avoid using narrative writing techniques in their responses.

The most engaging and successful descriptions were those where the candidates had carefully selected vocabulary to create a realistic and credible sense of atmosphere, place or person, and which were well sequenced and carefully managed for deliberate effect. Successful responses included descriptions of towns or cities in which candidates lived, important rituals or festivals, or significant settings or places. Less successful tasks were those which asked candidates to describe events or scenarios of which they had no personal experience, or settings and situations in which the candidate clearly had no interest or engagement. Many of these responses relied on unconvincing descriptive writing which did not engage the reader. This type of writing is characteristic of work achieving marks from the middle to lower levels of the assessment criteria, although it was noticed that many centres awarded marks from the higher-level assessment criteria. This was quite often a reason for adjustment of marks from Table C (content and structure).

Whilst many candidates showed a secure and confident understanding of language, there was still a general tendency by a number of centres to award marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to work which contained ineffective overuse of literary techniques. Some moderators commented that this seemed to be actively encouraged by some centres. To achieve marks from the higher-level assessment criteria, candidates need to demonstrate a confident and secure understanding and use of language for specific effect. This is difficult for candidates to achieve if they over-use adjectives, include inappropriate images or idioms and/or use obscure or archaic language. The overworking of language was a common reason for moderators adjusting marks.

Another common reason for adjustments to marks was when moderators identified a trend of awarding marks from the higher-level assessment criteria to writing that contained a limited range of sentence structures, incorrectly constructed sentences, or contained frequent errors with punctuation and grammar. Writing that achieves marks from Levels 5 and 6 of Table D (style and accuracy) is expected to be consistently accurate, consistent with the chosen register, and demonstrate an ability to use a range of sentences for specific effect. The moderators saw some writing which displayed these characteristics, but a significant number of the assignments receiving marks from centres from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D more frequently displayed the characteristics of writing expected from Level 4 or below. Many candidates 'told' the reader about the scene being described, rather than engaging the reader with a careful and precise use of vocabulary and images. The moderators also noticed a general trend for candidates to use repeated sentence structures and create almost list-like descriptions.

In addition, the work of a significantly large number of candidates contained frequent and serious errors which impaired the meaning and overall effect of the candidates' work. The most frequent errors were missing prepositions and articles, tense inconsistencies, typing errors, commas used instead of full stops and grammar errors. Quite often, the meaning of sentences was blurred, or meaning was lost altogether. Errors which affect the meaning and clarity of writing cannot be considered as 'minor'. As mentioned earlier in this report, the absence of the indication of all errors made it difficult for the moderators to determine whether errors had been considered when marks had been awarded; moderators noted that on some weaker assignments no errors had been annotated and the summative comment declared a high level of accuracy.

Accurate and effective application of the assessment criteria is achieved through the careful weighing up of the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and the application of a mark which 'best fits' the assessment criteria. To achieve this, it is essential that errors are identified and indicated by the markers. Engaging in this process allows markers to effectively balance the strengths and weaknesses of a piece of writing and apply marks that are most appropriate to their candidates' work.

Information and guidance on how to apply the mark schemes are given in Coursework Handbook. Examples of good tasks and exemplification of the standard of work expected at the different levels of the mark scheme are also provided in the Coursework Handbook.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 2:

- use a range of vocabulary suited to the context and content of the description
- create images appropriate for the context and content of the description
- create an engaging imagined scenario using language designed to have an impact on the reader
- avoid slipping into a narrative style
- proof-read responses to identify and correct common errors such as missing articles and prepositions, switches in tenses and typing errors
- avoid repetitive sentence structures; instead use a range of sentences for create specific effect.

Assignment 3 (narrative)

Much of the task setting for **Assignment 3** was generally appropriate and moderators saw some engaging and effective narratives which were well controlled and convincing. Moderators reported seeing some tasks which did not invite narrative responses as they were too informative. Successful narratives were those in which candidates created stories characterised by well-defined plots and strongly developed features of narrative writing such as description, strong characterisation, and a clear sense of progression. The narration of personal experiences and events, or responses where candidates were able to create convincing details and events within their chosen genre, tended to be more successful. Candidates were generally less successful when their understanding of audience and genre was insecure, and the resulting narratives lacked credibility and conviction. Moderators commented that this sort of writing was often seen when candidates were writing in the genre of detective or murder mystery stories. Stories such as these, although containing a definite beginning, middle and ending, were often unrealistic and incredible, or lacked development of character or plot. Some responses failed to conclude properly, ending with an unconvincing or unsatisfactory cliff hanger. This sort of writing is classed as 'relevant' or 'straightforward' and should expect to be awarded marks from Level 4 or below from Table C (content and structure). Moderators noticed that there was a trend with a significant majority of the work sampled for centres to award marks from Levels 5 and 6 to writing which more appropriately fitted the Level 4, or below, assessment criteria. This was quite frequently a reason for marks being adjusted.

When moderators saw very accurate work containing precise well-chosen vocabulary, and which maintained a consistent register throughout, they could agree when centres awarded marks from Levels 5 and 6 in Table D (style and accuracy). As with **Assignments 1** and **2**, moderators noticed a significant trend for centres to award marks from the highest levels of the mark scheme to work which contained frequent and persistent errors and which more accurately met the assessment criteria from Level 4 or below in Table D. This was a common reason for adjustment of marks. The comments made for **Assignment 2** with regards to accuracy and the annotation of errors are also relevant to **Assignment 3** and should be noted by all who mark coursework.

Advice to candidates for Assignment 3:

- create stories that are realistic, credible, and convincing
- remember that characters' thoughts and feelings help to engage the reader
- avoid clichéd scenarios and consider an individual and original selection of content
- carefully proof-read and check assignments for errors such as punctuation, use of prepositions and articles, tenses, and construction of sentences.

FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (ORAL ENDORSEMENT)

Paper 0500/04
Speaking and Listening Test

Key messages

Centre administration was of a high standard and most centres coped well with their application of Submit for Assessment (SfA).

Correct timing in the test is vital to successful performance. Generally, the candidates who observed the 3–4 minutes allowed for **Part 1** through careful preparation and practise were more successful. The timing of **Part 2** was more problematic for some centres. Examiners must ensure a minimum of 7 minutes is allowed each candidate. Other centres ignored the maximum 8 minute ceiling and allowed candidates to converse for much longer. This is unnecessary and often counter-productive.

Moderators reported relatively few issues with the general level of accuracy of the assessment. Where moderators made recommendations of scaling it was usually because centres had not differentiated appropriately between different levels of attainment, particularly in **Part 2** and specifically between Level 4 and Level 5.

Where lenient assessment had taken place at the top end of the mark scheme for responses to **Part 1**, it was often because the candidates had chosen topics that were not sufficiently challenging which resulted in mainly narrative presentations. These were often lacking sufficient development or a defined structure.

Where lenient assessment had taken place at the top end of the mark scheme for responses to **Part 2**, it was often because the candidates were given credit for responses that were not 'consistently' developed or where the examiner was in control of the conversation and the candidate was too passive. It is for this reason that a **Part 2 – Conversation** based heavily on a question and answer model is discouraged.

Where centres had been severe in the lower levels of the mark scheme it was often because the centre did not have a range of abilities represented in the cohort. Sometimes centres were reluctant to 'bunch' marks even though performance suggested they should be.

There were few reported instances of the rank order of merit being problematic within centres.

Each candidate's test requires a full formal introduction to be made prior to the beginning of **Part 1**. This introduction should include the centre name and number, the candidate's full name and candidate number, the date on which the test is being recorded and the name of the examiner. This is important information for the moderator.

General comments

Administration

For most centres, administration of the test was diligent, accurate and easy to follow. Summary forms were completed to a high degree of accuracy and samples uploaded to SfA were well-chosen and reflected the full range of marks awarded within the centre.

Where there were issues the following guidelines may help to clarify administrative requirements:

- Uploading the recordings for all the entered cohort remains the preferred option for moderators. This allows a moderator to carefully choose recordings to moderate that accurately reflect the performance of the centre across the whole range of its marking.
- Where instructions to centres regarding uploading samples to SfA differ, it is important that the centre chooses wisely which recordings to upload. Always the top and bottom marks in the centre's range must be included. A centre should then consider the grade boundaries, available to centres on the appropriate Cambridge website, and ensure the sample reflects these. A centre should consider which candidates' recordings best reflect the marks that have been awarded so that a fair representation of the centre's performance can be made by the moderator.
- Every test should begin with a full introduction to include the date on which the candidate is being examined. Think in the same terms as for a written examination where each candidate would be expected to complete their own information at the beginning of the answer booklet. For Component 04 it is the examiner who should complete the introduction but the same principle of identifying key information on an individual basis is still relevant. Thankfully, there were few instances of centres using generic introductions to their cohorts as these remain unacceptable.
- In a few cases the sound quality of the recordings was poor. Moderators commented that it was difficult to hear some candidates clearly, particularly during the **Part 1** presentations. Mostly, this was because the candidates were placed too far from the microphones being used.
- Internal moderation is actively encouraged, particularly where multiple examiners are involved within a centre. Where only one examiner is involved it may be possible to pair with another centre to discuss standards and to share good practice.
- When internal moderation has taken place and adjustments to marks have been made, it is helpful to the moderator if changes are indicated on the summary forms uploaded to SfA, where this is possible. This helps the moderator to understand the thought process behind the changes and can affect the overall judgement of a centre's marking.

Conduct of the test

Once again, the standard of examining was generally very good with candidates being given plenty of opportunities to express their ideas and demonstrate their range of oratory skills productively.

Where there were concerns, the following advice is offered:

- The First Language Test is very different to the one prescribed for Second Language English. In the very few cases where potential malpractice was considered for a centre the issue was how the test had been conducted. In each case the test had been conducted following the wrong syllabus. This is a serious matter with potentially damaging consequences for the candidates involved. It is the centre's responsibility to apply the rubric of the test correctly. The current syllabus for First Language English is very clear on how to proceed.
- It is strongly advised that each test should begin with the examiner's formal introduction and be followed immediately by the candidate performing **Part 1**, the **Individual Talk**. If an examiner feels that a candidate is very nervous and needs a moment of calming prior to the formal test beginning, it is recommended this is done before the recording is started. Examiners formally starting the test then engaging in 'off topic' conversation with candidates before asking them to begin their Part 1 task is discouraged.
- The examiner's role in **Part 1** is to be a passive listener who does not comment or interrupt during the presentation. Candidates should be discouraged from asking direct questions to the examiner in Part 1. Examiners should only intercede if a candidate is incapable of continuing the presentation without prompting but this should be reflected in the mark awarded as content cannot be considered more than 'adequate' in such instances.
- Given that both Speaking and Listening are assessed in **Part 2**, it is important that the conversations last long enough for candidates to demonstrate their strengths in both mediums. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure this minimum expectation of 7 minutes is met so that candidates are given the fullest opportunity to demonstrate the range of skills they possess.
- It is also important that the conversations offer sufficient challenge to allow candidates to demonstrate the range of skills they possess. Focused questioning and prompts are needed to move the conversation forward, together with an adaptability on the part of the examiner to absorb the candidate's previous comments and to extend the conversation as a result. A **Part 2** that is merely a question and answer session is not a natural conversation and is limited in terms of the marks that can be awarded as a consequence.

- Examiners who rely on a pre-determined set of questions disadvantage their candidates, in particular with regard to the mark for Speaking in **Part 2**. A question from the examiner should lead to an answer from the candidate which then may lead to a comment or prompt from the examiner that is connected to the same content matter. This will in turn lead to another connected response from the candidate; and so the conversation develops naturally.
- Examiners who dominate conversations or who frequently interrupt candidates during the conversation do so to the disadvantage of those candidates. Good examiners prompt candidates then allow them the opportunity to respond in full and to develop their ideas before moving the conversation forwards again.

Comments on specific sections of the test

Part 1 – Individual Talk

Moderators made the following comments regarding performance in **Part 1**:

Candidates mostly chose topics with a level of difficulty and had researched and planned thoroughly. Many used discourse markers and rhetorical questions effectively.

In summary, the vast majority of talks were interesting and informative.

The choice of topics was generally interesting and varied and usually reflected the candidates' passions and interests.

*Where candidates were passionate and knowledgeable about their subjects, they were usually effective. In these cases, it nearly always resulted in more sophisticated and enthusiastic **Part 2s**.*

Grade 1 candidates had built into their talks some analytical and higher level thinking.

Candidates who were not capable of achieving Grade 1 were often successful in delivering subjects in an interesting way. In these cases, the subjects chosen were ones that the candidates had close personal knowledge of and, with sensible guidance and preparation, could deliver with some analysis and personal insight, maintaining the interest of the listener.

*It should be noted that some higher level, conceptual topics only work well with able candidates; candidates that chose 'controversial' or 'impressive' topics without any real depth of knowledge on the subject often struggled to achieve detailed responses in **Part 2**.*

Grade 3 candidates were characterised by talks that were well planned and delivered adequately but were of a narrative nature and delivered in an unimaginative way.

In common with previous series, the overwhelming majority of responses to **Part 1** were traditional presentations seeking to inform, explain and analyse. There is absolutely nothing wrong with this approach as it is the safest way to deliver a good mark for the candidate if organised, prepared and delivered successfully. Where the format varied there were some really interesting monologues, often presented in character or based on the candidate's own fictional prose or poetry.

In terms of the topics chosen by candidates there was a wide range of varied and interesting subjects delivered with enthusiasm and good knowledge of the chosen subject matter. The majority of candidates prepared well, researched their chosen topics and kept within the prescribed time limit. There were, however, some candidates who had 'over-prepared' to a point where they were concentrating so much on delivering a memorised response verbatim that they forgot that, in essence, **Part 1** is a performance piece that requires engagement with an imaginary audience. This led to issues with delivery and a somewhat stilted performance not commensurate with Level 5.

Very strong performances in **Part 1** successfully combined excellent knowledge and development of a topic, a tightly defined structure timed accordingly and a lively delivery style. Choosing a topic that can be explored and developed within the 3–4 minute time limit remains the first step to success. A topic chosen merely to impress a moderator with its supposed maturity or complexity but with which the candidate has little empathy, knowledge or experience will almost certainly lead to a lesser mark than one chosen because the candidate has a real enthusiasm for it. Similarly, 'Wikipedia' style talks where there is linear content based on numerous facts but little developed opinion or analysis do not tend to be very successful because they lack

sufficient depth to engage the audience fully. It should also be remembered that half the marks for the test are accrued in **Part 2** so candidates have to be prepared to discuss in some depth the topics they have chosen. Any lack of knowledge is quickly exposed as the conversation develops. When choosing appropriate topics candidates should seriously consider whether they can easily discuss and develop subject content for the allotted 7–8 minute conversation.

A strong element of presentations achieving Level 5 in **Part 1** remains the structure underpinning the talks and supported by appropriate timing. A clearly defined persuasive argument or a cyclical arrangement that brings the concluding statement back to the initial point often helps candidates to fulfil 'the full and well-organised' descriptor for Level 5. Less successful structures tend to meander from point to point without such a strong sense of purpose. While structure itself does not confirm a mark in Level 5, it does provide a strong basis for candidates to exhibit their linguistic and presentational skills. Self-reflection and analysis remain strong elements in moving a talk beyond 'adequate'. Stronger candidates integrated a good range of language devices into their presentations adapting register, tone and pace to suit. Rhetorical questioning, the use of figurative language and other linguistic techniques were also used purposefully.

Based on the experience of this and past series, almost any topic can be successful if used appropriately but some do seem to lend themselves more successfully than others.

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that worked well include:

Controlling the narrative
My hobby – crocheting
Coffee addict
Colonising Mars
Follies of nationalism
Benefits of having a pet
Redefining beauty
Is E-sport a sport? (a balanced and perceptive response)
The impact of Galacticos (in Spanish football)
A message to my childhood bully (a fictional monologue)
Moving from Hong Kong
Teenage pregnancy (and its implications)
My love of music
Behind the scenes (stage crew)
Hippies
The value of travel
Mindfulness
Hard work

Some examples of **Part 1** topics from this series that were less successful include:

Hanging out with friends (unstructured and lacking any depth)
Ronaldo (basic and factual biography)
Toxicity in video games (Lacking development)
Social media (Lacking any real focus)
Football (general rules and unimaginative)
Retirement funds
Video games (too generalised with no specific focus or point of view)
Manga/Anime (generalised)
Pollution (too generalised with no specific focus or point of view)
Abortion (when chosen only to be controversial)
Technology (too generalised with no specific focus or point of view)

Often, less successful topics were chosen because of their perceived 'serious' nature by candidates who had limited interest in the actual issues involved. The resulting lack of knowledge was exposed in the **Part 2** conversation.

Part 2 – Conversation

Moderators made the following comments regarding performance in **Part 2**:

This was mainly satisfactory with examiners supportive of students and meeting all of the requirements.

Examiners stuck to the task and candidates spoke at length. In almost all cases examiners were supportive of candidates and showed an appropriate level of interest.

Discussions were often lively and interesting. The best examiners asked open questions and, where a candidate was clearly able, moved discussions into more conceptual areas which required analysis and higher thinking – this allowed the candidate to satisfy the criteria for the higher levels.

Some examiners struggled to open up candidates' talents with closed questioning and by offering too many of their own ideas during the discussions. Indeed, where a candidate was moved down a level during moderation, it was often due to a lack of detailed response, due in turn to uninspiring questioning.

Generally, the **Part 2** conversations were well conducted and examiners asked appropriate and interesting questions which enabled the candidates to extend and develop their ideas. After initial questioning to stimulate the conversation, the use of prompts, instead of a steady stream of further questioning, was often more effective in eliciting developed responses from candidates. Unlike in **Part 1**, the examiner can influence the quality of the candidate's performance in **Part 2**. The most skilful examiners asked open questions that fed directly from responses given by the candidate. Good examiners engaged fully with the topic and corresponding discussion and increased the complexity and subtlety of the questions in order to allow candidates to appropriately demonstrate their ability to deal with 'changes in the direction of the conversation'. It should be noted that this descriptor does not mean that examiners should steer the conversation away from the central topic to something completely different. 'Changes in the direction' can mean introducing a new perspective on the topic or challenging a previously stated opinion but any ensuing conversation should still be focused on the topic presented in **Part 1**.

Generally it was the case that examiners were supportive of candidates by remaining focused on the topic matter introduced in **Part 1** and showing an appropriate level of interest. Occasionally examiners spoke in too much detail and took too long to ask their questions. The aim should be to prompt and to lead rather than to debate. On rare occasions the examiner interrupted a candidate's response when there was clearly more to be heard, thus directly restricting what the candidate could say in response.

The examiner needs to engage with the candidate but needs also to ensure sufficient challenge in **Part 2** to stretch the candidate to perform at the highest level possible for that individual. In successful responses to **Part 2**, examiners managed the conversation with an awareness of providing openings for candidates to respond and develop points – they took part in the conversation but were mindful of moving on and asking questions or using prompts as a priority.

Where there were issues and improvement can be made in examining **Part 2** the following advice is offered:

- The timing of **Part 2** is controlled by the examiner. It is the examiner's responsibility to ensure **Part 2** lasts for at least 7 minutes in order to give candidates the fullest opportunity to demonstrate their skills and accrue marks.
- **Part 2** conversations solely conducted on a question and answer basis, where the series of questions is only loosely connected and responses from the candidate are then ignored in favour of the next question on the list, do not fulfil the descriptors in the higher levels.
- It is important that questions are open and not closed. Closed questions do not allow candidates to consistently answer in the necessary detail and depth to move beyond 'adequate'.
- Examiners must ensure the conversation is connected to the ideas presented in **Part 1** for the whole of **Part 2**. Veering into more generalised conversation does not help the candidate's performance. For example; if a candidate's topic is about Physics the examiner is justified in asking a question related to the candidate's future career plans in this sphere. However, a more general question about how the candidate has performed in other subjects is not focused sufficiently on the topic to be valid.
- Allowing the conversations to progress beyond the maximum time allowed of 8 minutes is unnecessary and may become counter-productive. It is very doubtful whether any contribution made by a candidate after the 8 minutes have been exceeded will have any bearing on the mark being awarded for **Part 2**.

Advice to centres

- Adhering to the correct timings for each part of the test will allow candidates the best opportunity to be successful.
- Make sure candidates know the timings of the test. Ensure that their Individual Talk is 3–4 minutes long. You can help them in the test by interceding before 5 minutes and initiating the conversation.
- Do not interrupt candidates in **Part 1** unless they have exceeded the allowed time. Only if they really do have nothing to add should you progress the test by intervening with prompts or words of encouragement. Your intercession should be reflected in the mark awarded for **Part 1**.
- Do not ask questions in **Part 1** as this signals the end of this part of the test and the beginning of **Part 2**, the conversation.
- Ensure a full 7–8 minutes is allowed for the conversation in **Part 2**. The examiner can control the timing of this.
- Administering the conversation in **Part 2** can be quite challenging for examiners so it may be necessary to practise just as the candidates should. Knowing the topic in advance and preparing some relevant back-up questions may help the examiner but they should not be restrictive and the candidate should have no prior knowledge of them.
- Helping a candidate choose the most appropriate topic is key to them being successful in the test. A gentle suggestion to choose an alternative topic may be very beneficial in some cases.
- Try to dissuade candidates from simply reeling off a memorised talk in **Part 1** that may have artificial fluency but lacks any emotional attachment and suffers from robotic intonation. It is much better to prepare using a cue card so that what is said has some level of spontaneity.
- Scaffold questions strategically to encourage higher level responses from more able candidates. This will help them to access the higher mark ranges.

Advice to candidates

- Choose a topic you are passionate about and one you can talk about for 3–4 minutes then discuss in even more detail for 7–8 minutes.
- Practise your presentation but do not learn it by heart.
- Have bullet point notes to help prompt you in **Part 1** but not the ‘full speech’. You will be tempted to read it or, at the very least, deliver it without appropriate liveliness and intonation. ‘Talk through’ each bullet point in a lively and enthusiastic way.
- Structure your Individual Talk carefully, making sure that it develops points and stays within the 3–4 minutes allowed. Long talks do not earn more marks! On the contrary, an overlong talk will be regarded as not being ‘well organised’ (required for Level 5 marks).
- Respond to the prompts and questions from the examiner in **Part 2** as fully as possible by developing your ideas, giving examples and leading off into other aspects of the topic if you can.
- Watch good examples of speeches/presentations/talks to learn how good speakers make their speeches lively and interesting. Try to copy these techniques.
- Practise simulations of **Part 2**. There are as many marks available for **Part 2** as for **Part 1** so treat each part as equally important.