

GENERAL PAPER

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level and GCE Advanced Ordinary Level

Papers 8001/01 and 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

Use of English

There are still some concerns about the length of sentences, and indeed essays, with some candidates apparently believing that the number of words written is in direct proportion to the mark awarded. Combine this with a tendency to rush to impart all the information and legibility can be compromised.

Conviction of argument is best presented in clear crisp sentences, and there is no need for repetition. It was common to find a point made in an introduction repeated word for word in a developing passage and then once more reiterated in the conclusion. Such a tedious approach blurred the focus of the argument.

Spelling and punctuation are improving each year, which is a pleasing trend. However, it was noted by some Examiners that there were many candidates who appeared to have learned a list of vocabulary. They were then at pains to include this vocabulary, whether or not it was appropriate. The correct usage of words, terms, expressions can only enhance an essay. There is little point in using vocabulary to impress, as this invariably robs the essay of coherence.

On a more positive note, it was evident that colloquial expression was less prevalent. Candidates should always keep at the forefront of their mind that they are writing an academic essay, even if they choose to utilise anecdotal material. This was observed particularly with regard to the question on the family.

Content

This year saw a majority of candidates opting for three questions, with varying degrees of success. One point has been made repeatedly by Examiners – that candidates still need to practice the presentation of a balanced discussion systematically, through a sustained level of argument to an appropriate conclusion. Too often one element is the focus of attention, to the exclusion of all others; this was particularly so in the case of the question on terrorism and also the question on the environment.

It is vital that candidates appreciate when a question needs a definition, for instance in the question on terrorism. A clear exposition of the candidates' understanding of the term will demonstrate not only their awareness, but their ability to appreciate differing interpretations and shades of opinion.

Equally, it is vital that candidates realise how crucial it is to exemplify their answers and arguments. Supporting evidence, whether local or international, strengthens and validates the viewpoints expressed.

It was interesting to note that 90% of the candidates sitting 8004 chose their questions from the first two sections on the paper. On 8001, 80% of the candidates made their selection from the first half of the questions. Examiners are concerned that all candidates do, in fact, read all the questions and consider them equally before choosing. These statistics could indicate that candidates see a topic and, knowing something about it, select it in haste and read no further. It is to be hoped that the range of topics offered would embrace something of interest for everyone and encourage all candidates to make a considered choice.

All of the Examiners have once again been impressed by the obviously serious and earnest approach demonstrated by the candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Does one country ever have the right to influence the internal affairs of another?

This was a very popular question in the light of the recent events of September 11th. There were some emotive responses based solely on the rights and wrongs of the American action in Afghanistan, as perceived by the candidates, from their varying and different political backgrounds. Many of these employed rhetoric and lost marks as a result. Those candidates who did respond to this well were almost universally students of history and they were able to use their knowledge of twentieth century political history competently, usually from the 1970s onwards.

Few looked at the issue in terms of economic influence or sanctions.

On balance, there was a 50/50 split between yes and no, with most attempting to present a conclusion that reflected both sides of a contentious topic.

There is an object lesson here for candidates. They should be warned that if a question comes up that is highly topical and candidates have a very strong viewpoint, it may be better to avoid it in terms of academic expediency. Passionate responses can rob an essay of objective argument.

Question 2

Is it more important to deal with the causes of crime than its punishment?

This was one of the three most popular questions. Most candidates were able to write with conviction of the causes of crime, as expected, concentrating on poverty, deprivation, political estrangement, etc. Equally, almost all of the candidates looked at the function of punishment as a deterrent or as a retributive measure.

Few candidates offered any religious or moral aspect, which was surprising. Most answered the question – is it more ‘important’ with a great deal of success. This was one of the high scoring questions.

Question 3

Is terrorist action ever justified?

This was the most popular question this year, with 90% of the responses writing from the point of view of September 11th. Emotive and descriptive answers ranged from the CNN reporting, to the horror that will never leave us and make us all afraid to board an aeroplane again.

The remainder attempted a definition, which was essential, and it was encouraging to see an understanding of the wider concept, not merely the suicide bomber, but attacks on property and symbols of power.

There was also a cogent argument from some about the issue of yesterday’s terrorist becoming the freedom fighter of today; Mandela was frequently mentioned here, predictably, but so too was Mugabe.

Question 4

Can countries with a history of conflict achieve real peace and trust?

There were few responses to this question. Once again, those who achieved good marks were the students of history, who made a sound choice. Most answers were equivocal, cataloguing the conflict of the past from individual countries; few were prepared to assess present or future situations in terms of peace or trust.

Question 5

‘A family with no children is not a family at all.’ Discuss.

Although this was quite popular, it was not a question that was well answered. There were the inevitable sociological definitions of the term family. Most were, however, concerned with the changing patterns of marriage and female emancipation. Many confused family with marriage.

A disappointing number of candidates turned the question to an individual interpretation, writing about the position of women in society and their increased desire for freedom and material wealth.

Few appeared to be aware of the changing patterns of family life, yet this is covered, ad nauseam perhaps, via the medium of soap operas from the west.

There was also no mention made of family planning.

Question 6

'The environment is being harmed more by human activity than natural disasters.' Do you agree?

This was the most popular question on the paper and all candidates saw it as an opportunity to write copious amounts of information on global warming, greenhouse gases, acid rain etc. There was a heavy weighting towards the part of human degradation, with universal condemnation. Many answers lacked a balance.

It was obvious that this was a prepared topic, and generally well understood, but candidates must be careful not to fall into the trap of presenting everything they know, whether or not it is actually required by the specific remit of the question.

Question 7

Would education be improved if it took place at home by means of modern technology?

This was tackled by many. Almost all candidates saw the obvious drawbacks of studying at home – isolation, lack of teacher input etc. Few, however, saw the social disadvantages of not mixing with peers, the lack of opportunity for sport, competition etc.

Too many became digressive about the 'dangers' of the internet and all the corruptive material there, waiting to be accessed by innocent youth. These invariably became lengthy discourses that lost the focus of the essay.

Hardly any candidates saw the benefit of harnessing home study in conjunction with school via modern technology.

Question 8

What are the attractions and dangers of trying to predict future events and developments?

Few candidates chose to respond to this question, but those who did select it tended to be candidates who saw it as an opportunity to make rambling and generalised statements. Many looked at astronomy and astrology, fortune tellers and witch doctors.

Most wrote descriptive essays, rather than addressing the 'attractions' and 'dangers'.

Question 9

Does sport do more to encourage international rivalry than to overcome it?

Most candidates who chose this topic answered the question well. Many used, as we had hoped they would, the Olympic ideal of international sport and how this has been tainted by the corruption and match fixing, the drug abuse and cash incentives. Almost every response included relevant examples, one of the few questions on the paper where this was apparent, which considerably strengthened the content mark awarded.

Question 10

'The camera can never lie.' Is this true?

There was a very small percentage of responses to this question and most were weak. Hardly any candidates mentioned the intention of the photograph, as a record of an event or a portrayal of a person, to convey a message, or to be an art form.

Despite the evidence from any study of mid twentieth century history onwards, no one gave an example of where a photograph has been tampered with for political purposes. There was little coverage of the use of the photograph by the media, other than the infamous paparazzi and the late Princess Diana.

This was the least well answered question on the paper.

Question 11

'Media celebrities are over-rated and over-paid.' Do you agree?

There were no responses seen to this question.

Question 12

'Science fiction is simply fantasy and escapism.' Discuss.

This was popular, but fundamentally weakened by a lack of examples. Some candidates, who obviously do read from this genre, did mention some notable giants, for example, Tolkien, Asimov and there was some awareness of Harry Potter, but these were in a minority. Remarkably, those who looked at this from the point of view of television or film gave almost no examples. Exemplification in a topic area such as this is absolutely vital, especially with the wording of the question which was designed to be provocative.

Additional questions 8004

Question 13

'We have a right to know about everything that is happening in our society.' Discuss.

This was answered in very general terms by those candidates who selected it. There was little attempt to support assertion with examples, which was a key element of the question. There appeared to be no awareness of the essential nature of the 'right to know' as the cornerstone of a democratic society.

Question 14

How can the health of children in your country be improved?

There were a number of responses to this, which ranged from a sound and mature appraisal to an anecdotal reminiscence or condemnation of existing health facilities. Almost all candidates provided a picture of the conditions within their country, with many giving sensible and viable suggestions for improvement.

On the whole this question attracted some informed answers.

Question 15

'The old and the young do not speak the same language.' Discuss.

There were varying interpretations of this question. These were divided between a linguistics based approach and those who wrote about the age/generation gap in vague terms.

Both approaches were marked on their own merits. Some even combined both.

Paper 8001/02

Paper 2

General comments

Although both **Questions 2** and **3** attracted a fair number of candidates, most elected to tackle **Question 1**. As in previous years, Examiners were inclined to wonder how many candidates realised that the time allowed in the examination for a preliminary study of the paper was, first and foremost, for them to weigh up the pros and cons of each question before deciding which one to attempt. For example, a candidate who had never taken to close reading but had enjoyed participating in discussion would be well advised to eschew the comprehension exercise, **Question 1**, and instead, give serious consideration to the presentation of the case for and against a particular course of action, **Question 2**. By the same token, anyone whose command of written English did not extend to one or more pieces of continuous prose,

Question 2, might well feel more comfortable with the short responses postulated, this year, by **Question 3**. Again, the format and requirements of **Questions 1** and **2** might have struck candidates as being perfectly familiar, whereas nothing quite like **Question 3** had ever been set before. Finally, candidates should have looked at the content of each question and asked themselves which was the most congenial: scientific speculation, as in **Question 1**; arguments centred or economic, in **Question 2**; or analysis of the kind of disaster that is reported night after night on the television, as in **Question 3**. Despite this, there was no evidence, this year, that candidates were pressed for time. Indeed, many made extensive notes before making a fair copy or wrote far more than was required.

Writing far more than was required, as always, took various forms. Only a handful of candidates tried to hedge their bets by attempting more than one question, a practice that has been condemned so often in the past that it needs no further strictures in this report. However, in **Question 1**, it was quite common to find candidates discussing all three scientific achievements in part **(b)**, defining eight rather than six words in part **(e)(i)**, writing eight rather than six sentences in part **(e)(ii)**, and referring to more than four major developments in technology in part **(f)**. Marks were forfeited when candidates decided to write more than one sentence for each of their chosen examples in **Question 1**, part **(e)(i)**, instances such as 'John offered a plausible excuse for his absence. He looked far more ill than when we saw him last' being all too frequent. Finally, word limits were blatantly disregarded on many occasions when candidates tackled **Question 1 (f)**, **Question 2 (a)** and **(b)**, while sometimes, little heed was paid to instructions such as 'summarise' in **Question 1 (a)**, 'briefly' in **Questions 1 (b)** and **3 (b)**, or 'outline' in **Question 3 (c)**.

Regarding written English, candidates did seem, this year, to make much more of a sustained effort to use their own words when specifically instructed to do so, but tended to revert to the unselective regurgitation of the text whenever how they should express themselves was left to their discretion. Although scripts varied from the incomprehensible to the impeccable, gross carelessness was seldom in evidence. As a general rule, syntax was far less assured than spelling and punctuation, while there was a tendency to use long words which did not quite fit their context. Most scripts were legible, although, in some answers, it was difficult to distinguish between what was crossed out and what was not. Elsewhere, the liberal application of correction fluid in order to cut down the length of an answer produced awkward lacunae and, at the same time, drew the Examiner's attention to the fact that the candidates had not thought sufficiently about a question before putting pen to paper.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

A fair number of candidates made a respectable showing in this question, but those who found the passage formidable fell back on paraphrasing line after line or on guesswork, the result being much irrelevance. In general, a scientific background must have stood candidates in good stead but, on occasion, it led them to introduce extraneous knowledge, especially in part **(f)**.

- (a)** Most candidates were aware of what the question postulated, although very few successfully distinguished between acquiring knowledge and making use of that knowledge. A significant minority ignored the rubric and referred at great length to specific scientific achievements. Others tended to introduce arguments that were more appropriate to part **(c)**.
- (b)** The computer revolution proved the most popular of the three options and justice was usually done to advantages, such as improved communication and disadvantages, such as increased unemployment. Assessment of the scale of impact was often implicit rather than explicit. The weakest candidates ignored 'achievements... during the past 100 years' and concentrated on the third paragraph of the text, which dealt with the future development of robots.

The more successful candidates, who wrote about test-tube babies, appreciated their benefit to childless couples and outlined some of the ethical objections that could be raised. Others went into far too much anatomical detail or revealed their ignorance as when they kept the foetus in the test-tube for the whole nine months. All too often, faulty technique led candidates to deviate into cloning and designer babies.

Relatively few candidates wrote about the atomic bomb. Those who did, tended to skip over the events of August 1945 and its significance during the Cold War, and to lay far too much emphasis on the subsequent development of atomic energy. In the least rewarding answers, misconceptions, such as the use of the atomic bomb against terrorists or in every type of limited warfare, abounded.

- (c) To earn the marks, candidates had to look beyond the specific examples of research to discover the trends they illustrated. Few were able to do this, the result being a tendency to fall back on description and discussion of the International Space Station and the Big Bang Theory.
- (d) By way of contrast, shrewd responses were the norm in this question, ignorance or a concern with more mundane issues being the most frequent reasons given to account for the apathy of the general public towards research into the Big Bang Theory. Many candidates introduced the religious dimension without specifying how it conflicted with such an explanation of the origin of the universe. On occasion, candidates misguidedly confined themselves to the passage and became bogged down in technicalities.
- (e) This standard feature seemed to cause more problems than usual, in that the definitions of the chosen words often lacked focus, while the sentences that were supposed to illustrate their meaning could frequently have meant something entirely different or employed the wrong part of speech. Thus, candidates, for example, confused 'fundamentals' with 'principles' and used the adjective 'fundamental' instead of the noun in the sentence they composed. Again, they usually understood the general sense of 'hereditary', but changed this to 'heredity' in the second half of the question. Perversity was evident in the case of 'therapy' which, on occasion, was transformed into 'physiotherapy' or 'radiotherapy'. Finally, 'harnessing' was often employed in exactly the same context as in the passage, or was used in a completely different sense on horses, or was confused with 'harvesting'.
- (f) This question was well answered as a rule, with candidates showing a sound grasp of the relevant section of the passage. Quite a few candidates, however, exceeded their brief and extended the discussion beyond the developments mentioned in the text or introduced disadvantages of their own invention. The main blemish, however, was too much emphasis being laid on the first development, AI, this being most evident in responses that grossly disregarded the word limit.

Question 2

Questions of this nature have been set so frequently in the past that Centres should be well aware of the pitfalls associated with them. In particular, candidates who simply string together the relevant points that they have gleaned from the text without any attempt to expand on them or to marshal them into a coherent argument aimed at persuading a specific audience are unlikely to gain many marks. It was, however, pleasing to note that most candidates did endeavour to use their own words.

- (a)(b) On this particular occasion, the fate of the National Museum and the Folk Theatre was supposed to be in the balance, but some candidates mistakenly attempted to justify a decision about them that had already been taken. Only the most capable couched their argument in a letter directed at a newspaper readership, although most observed epistolary conventions at the beginning and the end. Again, only the most astute realised that both buildings had to be appraised in both answers, for there was a tendency to concentrate on the one, at the expense of the other. As indicated earlier, the word limit of 150 words was frequently flouted. When it was, the weaker candidates spent a long time introducing or paraphrasing the actual question so that they had hardly become relevant before enough was considered enough. Those, however, who avoided all the faulty examination techniques mentioned above, produced thoroughly competent work even if it did lack panache.
- (c) Some candidates misunderstood the question and, as so often in the past, simply introduced material that they had used on a previous occasion. Most commonly, candidates were unable to advance along more than two lines of attack, the most usual being the government's failure to deal with the beggars outside and the satire within the Folk Theatre.

Question 3

Although the performance of candidates varied from Centre to Centre, those who chose this question in preference to the other two seemed to find it entirely congenial despite its novelty.

- (a) Candidates could quite legitimately mention some kinds of assistance that would be invaluable in all four situations. The most perceptive, however, recognised that each disaster also necessitated a specific type of aid. The best responses distinguished between what was needed for immediate assistance (fire hoses, for example, in the case of Dramende) and in the long term (in this case, reforestation).

- (b)** When it came to matching disaster areas with what would most benefit them, candidates usually relied on their common sense, the exception being the use of explosives in the midst of a conflagration as a means of removing the rubble of collapsed buildings in order to release trapped people, or as a quick way of preventing further earthquakes or of creating large communal graves.
- (c)** Almost without exception, candidates correctly picked automatic washing powder as the most useless item that could be sent to any of the disaster areas, although far fewer could articulate their reservations. A few opted for face masks on the grounds that beauty treatments were not appropriate, whereas they might have realised that another type of face mask would have been a boon in suffocating smoke or dust.
- (d)** This was the only question to which the majority of candidates failed to do justice, many responses being superficial, as when they simply referred to forest fires being started by careless cigarette smokers, or limited to one obvious explanation, such as the primitive farming techniques in Bolebo. Elsewhere, general environmental issues, such as the greenhouse effect were introduced, but not given enough local colour. As a rule, the treatment of the disaster at Cortensov was the most successful, with much being made of the misguided siting, the flawed design and the faulty construction of the dam.