

# **Examiners' Reports**

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**June 2011**

**J350/R/11**

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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### English (J350)

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## A641 Reading Literary Texts

### General Comments

In this second session of the new specification, there were more entries than in January, covering a wider range of texts and with centres taking up the option to use themed tasks. Correspondence with centres has indicated that more will be choosing to use themed tasks with their own choice of text for submission next year, with one opting this session for *Much Ado About Nothing*. The requirement to select a text from Different Cultures and Literary Heritage from the poetry and prose means that centres opting for *Of Mice and Men* selected Owen's poetry; choosing to enter for Duffy or Zephaniah would require the prose text to be either *Pride and Prejudice* or *The Withered Arm and Other Wessex Tales*. A themed task can be used to cover all three texts – from the set list, centre chosen, or a combination of these options; whilst one centre used the same task on each of the three texts separately, it is possible to write one combined assessment and there is no requirement to compare.

Although there was some clear variation in terms of length, each task was generally well within the 1000 word limit recommended, keeping within the overall total of 3000 words. Some might have benefited from developing their ideas further in order to access bands 1 and 2. The candidates appeared to have completed the tasks within the time limit allowed. Where notes were included with the work as was evident with some candidates, these were very helpful in seeing how the final task had been produced.

In their dealing with the texts, there was evidence of some sound understanding and a generally clear focus on the task. It was pleasing to see that centres had worked within the spirit of controlled assessment by thoroughly preparing their candidates without straitjacketing them in a specific plan.

The social and historical context of texts was addressed in all three tasks, although there was some tendency to begin with the (seemingly obligatory) biography of the writer or the conditions at the time of writing, or to add intermittent comments on context not grounded in the text or used to illuminate understanding. However, the very best used it to develop their exploration of the characters' loneliness in *Of Mice and Men*, the pride and honour of male characters in *Romeo and Juliet*, the expectations of women in *Much Ado About Nothing* and the ways in which Owen shows that for soldiers, war was not a sweet and noble thing.

It is evident that candidates are using the PEE (point, evidence, evaluation) chain to enable them to comment on language. However, it was noted by moderators that this can become rather limiting, sometimes hindering the development of ideas about the text, especially if the essay is set out entirely in this way, or where PEE is written down the side of the response. It did not allow for a cohesive response. In addition, candidates often repeated the quotation in their explanation or simply translated it. "In this quote" frequently opened a sentence and references were often over-long. The ability, especially in poetry essays, to explore the effects of language – as opposed to either explaining the meaning or merely giving a general statement such as "This makes the reader feel sympathy" or "This shows that Owen was bitter about war" – signals the candidate appreciating how language works and often signals a move into band 4.

Candidates were well prepared, especially considering they were submitting all three literary texts at the end of Year 10, and there was evidence of a clearly personal response to the texts emerging. However, a relative lack of maturity was often evident in the (lack of) depth and quality of analysis produced under controlled conditions. The quality of the responses was generally consistent across all three genres, with that on poetry being sometimes slightly stronger. It was pleasing to note that in general the tasks were addressed and candidates had a secure understanding of the texts.

Most of the assessment, annotation and summative comments were clear and helpful. The majority kept strictly to the band descriptors and the most useful identified examples of the criteria in the body of the response as well as giving a concise summary at the end or on the cover sheet. Some of the work contained insufficient annotation and commentary: some pages had no teacher marks at all and this made it more difficult to see how the centre had awarded the final marks.

### Question specific comments

#### THEMED TASKS

*To what extent does the writer make you feel sympathy for **one** or **two** characters in the text(s) you have studied?*

This task was used effectively across all three genres, especially with regard to *Of Mice and Men*, *Romeo and Juliet* and a selection of Owen's poems, where the candidates explored how the writer makes the reader feel sympathy for particular soldiers at war. Candidates made their selection from virtually all the characters in *Of Mice and Men*, reflecting on how issues of racism, sexism and the impact of the American Depression (and the itinerant lifestyle) affected those on the ranch. An appreciation of prejudice as well as an awareness of Lennie's mental difficulties encouraged some strong personal responses, often grounded in detail from the text, and the best explored the ways in which Steinbeck's language affected the reader's feelings of sympathy. The study of *Tsotsi* encouraged candidates to consider the impact of context as well as the events in the novel which affected the characters, with a range of characters being chosen, including *Tsotsi* himself. Characters from *Romeo and Juliet* included not only Romeo and Juliet, but also Mercutio and Friar Lawrence, and there was evidence of some appreciation of the ways in which the conflict between love and hate lead to the parting of the lovers, deaths of characters and the final tragedy, some expressing sympathy for Friar Lawrence in his desire to do good. In responding to Owen's poetry, candidates identified the horrific conditions, the youthfulness of the soldiers sent to fight and both the physical and mental suffering of the soldiers. As can be seen in the comments relating to the set task on Owen, the best responses were grounded in an appreciation of the language and structure of the text.

*How does the writer present particular attitudes and beliefs in the text(s) you have studied?*

It was pleasing to see responses which used this themed task to consider attitudes to women in *Much Ado About Nothing*, with some good appreciation of how this affected the treatment of the female characters. There were some rather simplistic and generalised statements about the role of women at the time, but also evidence of understanding of text, task and straightforward support for points by means of quotations. Dramatic effectiveness was occasionally noted, when textual references were made, but thorough analysis of language was not generally seen.

#### PROSE OR LITERARY NON-FICTION *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck

*"Guys like us are the loneliest guys in the world". How far does the relationship between George and Lennie challenge this idea?*

While a substantial number of responses focused on the ways in which characters are lonely, only some went on to look at how George and Lennie's relationship makes them different. Many omitted to explore this and therefore lost focus since the task focuses explicitly on this relationship. Given that the tasks remain the same for the second year of the specification (January and June 2012), it is advised that centres take note of this advice for their submission next year. The best answers used other relationships to highlight what is different about George

and Lennie and some explored the extent to which either or both of George and Lennie are lonely in spite of their friendship.

The responses to this task showed candidates enjoying the opportunity to write about the central relationship and appreciating the contextual reasons for characters' loneliness, referring to the lack of stability, trust and harshness of ranch life. Some of the stronger, secure middle band responses explored the differences between George and Lennie's relationship and others on the ranch, often picking up on Lennie's cry of "Not us, because I got you to look after me and you got me to look after you" to reflect on how this prevented them being lonely. There was some insight evident in comments referring to the way that even George and Lennie were, at times, lonely. There was a tendency to explore the ways in which Steinbeck presents the theme of loneliness and discuss which characters are lonely and why, rather than to use examples of these other characters to show how the relationship between George and Lennie is different, hence losing a focus on the question even in the stronger middle band responses. To access the top bands, candidates needed to ensure this tight focus on the task set, with quotations being used to show an understanding of the writer's purpose and of how meaning is created. Lower band responses generally commented in a straightforward way on how and why characters are lonely, with some reflection on how George and Lennie support each other, but a greater degree of narrative where the relevance was implicit.

### **Notes From a Small Island by Bill Bryson**

*Explore the ways in which Bryson creates entertaining descriptions of the hotels and other accommodation he stays in during his tour of Britain.*

This session saw this text being used for the first time with evidence of appreciation of the humour and straightforward understanding of the language devices used. At band 5 level this tended to lead to explanation of the reference used, with some commentary of how it created specific effects beginning to show at band 4.

### **DRAMA: WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

#### ***Romeo and Juliet***

*How does Shakespeare show the importance of pride and honour to **one** or **two** male characters in the play?*

Whilst Tybalt, Capulet and Romeo were the characters generally selected for exploration by candidates, the roles of Mercutio and Friar Lawrence were also mentioned. As was seen in January, some candidates diluted the potential strength of their exploration by dealing with too many characters, and centres are advised that the instruction to deal with one or two characters as the central focus of the response is intended to enable them to explore in more detail and depth. Most responses began well but then lost focus and there was a tendency to recount the scene, rather than analyse.

Candidates showed a strong engagement with the play. The strong middle band responses seen showed a secure knowledge and understanding, with some awareness of how characters revealed their sense of pride and honour in different ways, and some appreciation of the difference between pride and honour. To access the top two bands, candidates needed to explore the language and dramatic devices used to present pride and honour in the male characters, using short, apt quotations as the basis for analytical comment rather than explanation. Lower band responses tended to focus on characters' actions, often leaving the link to pride and honour more implicit than explicit and using quotation to support an account of events. Such quotations were often introduced by paraphrase and then followed by a translation.

However, it was pleasing to note the sustained use of the text at virtually all levels and the absence of confusion with the modern film version of the play.

## **POETRY: SELECTED POEMS**

### **Wilfred Owen**

*How far does Owen challenge the idea that it is a sweet and noble thing to die for one's country?*

The poems chosen to answer this question often included *Dulce et Decorum Est* (from which the reference to "sweet and noble" in the task is drawn), *Anthem for Doomed Youth*, *The Sentry*, *Dead Beat*, *Strange Meeting* and *Disabled* and it was pleasing to see the level of understanding, with very little confusion or distortion of meaning evident in candidates' responses. There were fewer candidates than in January who chose to include up to five poems which, with a recommended word limit of 1000, inevitably limited the depth of their analysis. There was some understanding of Owen's experiences of war and of how this affected his attitude to it, all being able to see how his poetry expresses his negative feelings. At the lower levels this was expressed in terms of the physical suffering and by reference to the horrible conditions faced by the soldiers, with some relevant quotations used as evidence, whereas the more secure middle band responses also showed some insight into the mental suffering of the soldiers. Whilst there was some awareness of Owen's tone in stronger responses, and in the top band 3 responses an ability to reflect on how choices of language create meaning, the majority tended to name devices and be more limited in their ability to explore the effect created. At the lower band level, candidates showed some straightforward understanding and often self-penalized by writing very little. Although it was evident that only the stronger candidates understood the reference within the question, all were able to show a grasp of how Owen's poetry reveals the horrors of war, making responses more directly relevant to the question than was often the case in *Of Mice and Men*.

### **Carol Ann Duffy**

*Explore how Duffy portrays everyday experiences in her poetry.*

There was a very small entry for this task in this session. Some depth to the response and understanding was evident, but it was explanation rather than an exploration of the effects of language. A clearer focus on the use of poetic techniques and the effects created will lift candidates into band 4 and above.

## A642 Imaginative Writing

There was a very small entry in this session. The vast majority of responses were in Bands 3, 4 and 5 which suggests that centres are choosing to enter a narrow range of candidates for this unit at this point. Some centres submitted their folders late, which caused delays in the moderation process, and more efficient administration is to be hoped for in the next session, as centres become more familiar with the new specification.

Centres presented their folders clearly and made helpful summative comments on the cover sheets. It was of great help to the moderators where centres had annotated the actual responses to the tasks in some detail and made clear references to the mark scheme to show how they had arrived at the final mark. Very few centres included candidates' notes so it was difficult to be sure how, and how well, candidates were prepared for the tasks.

In the highest bands, students made effective use of vocabulary to create engaging responses which also made clear and illuminating links between the two tasks. At this level candidates would benefit from more careful consideration of how to structure their texts to best effect and should avoid extravagant vocabulary and expression for its own sake. In the middle bands there were clear and organised responses that had some sense of structure and some use of varied sentences. It was clear, however, that candidates at this level would benefit from using a more imaginative vocabulary and linking paragraphs carefully. Candidates in the lower bands sometimes expressed their ideas clearly and should be encouraged to make their sentences clearer by avoiding linking a long sequence of clauses with "and" and "so". At all levels there was great uncertainty about punctuation between sentences and the use of punctuation within sentences was often a marker of a higher band answer.

### Comments on Individual Tasks

#### Section A – Media

Section A was generally handled well with some detailed descriptions of contenders for the title of worst place, written in an appropriate style. There was evidence that some centres had provided too much scaffolding for the work so that some candidates worked through the same list of features of the worst place.

All the centres that chose this section selected 2a as the satellite task. The clear letter format supported candidates in organising their ideas well. The best answers developed an argument throughout the text, with clearly linked paragraphs, while those in the middle bands tended simply to list features. Both pieces gave plenty of scope for candidates to use a wide range of imaginative vocabulary and rhetorical techniques to support their argument.

#### Section B – Text Development

Centres had taken full advantage of the opportunities offered by Section B Task 1 to recount a fascinating range of imagined meetings. The best found plausible reasons for an encounter and explored its significance for the characters in some depth. Less successful answers spent too little time on the encounter itself and would have benefitted from establishing more clearly who the characters were.

Many candidates chose the letter as the satellite task in section B and found the task accessible and the format supportive. The few who chose 2a were able to adopt a suitable style and tone for the monologue but less confident about how to organise the piece. The fact that no candidates attempted 2b suggests some uncertainty about the guidebook format on the part of both centres and candidates. Annotations on the Text Development tasks suggested that some centres may be taking into account candidates' understanding of the source texts as well as their writing skills, which is not the aim of the assessment.



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Overall the centres that submitted folders in this session should be congratulated for their management of the controlled assessment of imaginative writing. Most candidates were able to respond with enthusiasm and imagination to the tasks offered and moderators enjoyed the wide range of responses that were offered.

## A643 Speaking and Listening

### General Comments

With centres still delivering the legacy specification to their Year 11 groups, and many centres choosing not to enter Year 10 candidates at this stage, the entry was, as expected, very small. With changes to the terminal rule, centres may use any of the Controlled Assessment units for final assessment, so centres are deferring their entry for this unit until later in the course. However those centres that did enter candidates early will profit from centre specific feedback to confirm or modify their practice.

### Task setting

The requirement to cover the three different contexts is familiar from the legacy specification, so centres are experienced in setting appropriate activities to meet this aspect of Speaking and Listening task setting. However there is the new requirement of the “real-life context in and beyond the classroom”. This is not an extra to the basic three contexts, but must be included as an aspect of any one of them, at the discretion of a centre and as appropriate to the situation. Centres must adapt and/or develop new activities to take this requirement into account, and while the majority of centres had embraced this new requirement with imaginative and enabling tasks, some centres need to review their task setting.

The “real-life context” requires more than just subject matter which extends beyond the classroom; rather it is a matter of purpose and audience: context. So, successful tasks often linked this context to the drama-focussed context or role play of some form: mock interviews, reality shows, and representatives of charities or pressure groups. Some centres were able to give their candidates an actual “real-life context”: presentations to parents and governors, or Heads of Year. These were often, but not exclusively, centres with a small entry. Tasks which were not valid, included: general discussions on attitudes to war; the advantages and disadvantages of various social and moral issues; or a “talk to the class” with the candidates participating as themselves.

For further support and guidance to fulfil the demands of the “real-life context”, attention is drawn to the ‘Real-Life Context Guide’ document on the OCR website, to activities on the Training and Guidance DVD issued to centres in the autumn term 2010 and on the next DVD due in September 2011, as well as to the Controlled Assessment Consultancy. Through the consultancy, a centre’s tasks may be validated.

Similarly problematic, for some centres, was the drama-focussed context. Centres need to link tasks to the assessment criteria for this context. There is no requirement for the stimulus material to be drama based or even literary based; indeed, more scope may be granted if candidates are freed from such, and are given the opportunity to create independent roles separated from drama texts. Simply performing a scene verbatim from a play (usually a Shakespeare play), without any adaptation, does not allow candidates the opportunity to meet the marking criteria.

One centre linked Speaking and Listening activities with work for A652 Section B: Spoken Language, through an activity based on cookery presenters, which covered the “real-life context” and the drama-focussed context.

With the crossover of the two units A643 and A652 Section A, centres may take this opportunity to review completely the bank of tasks used.

## **Record keeping**

A key part of the process is record keeping. Centres are advised to maintain on-going records for all candidates; perhaps making use of a centrally held database of marks for candidates, with written comments. Such good practice in centres can help to prevent problems arising from staff absences, changes of staff etc. It also helps in the selection of the final three activities to be used to form the basis for assessment. The OCR designed form (form GCW316, available on the website) covers all the necessary elements required by the external moderator.

Centres must remember that candidates' record sheets form a vital piece of evidence in the moderation process. If there is a lack of detail in the description of activities, or when comments on performance have been "lifted" directly from the band descriptors with little or no linkage to individual candidate achievement, then it is extremely difficult to carry out the moderation of a centre.

It is a centre's responsibility to ensure that moderators are supplied with a comprehensive set of records, with all sections completed and marks/arithmetic checked to eliminate mathematical or transcription errors.

Many centres provided all the necessary information, with well-presented records, often word processed. However, a minority of centres had to be reminded of their responsibilities.

## **The Application of the Criteria**

The starting point for this must be achievement as set against the performance criteria, fixing first on the band and then on the mark within the band range. Comments on achievement, on candidates' assessment forms, should make reference to the band descriptors and give a mark out of 40 for each separate context. The final mark is based on a mathematical calculation; the three separate marks totalled and divided by three. Centres are advised to check the final calculation carefully, as mistakes were discovered by moderators. Importantly, no assumptions should be made as to a link between bands/marks and grades.

Good practice in awarding marks balances strengths and weaknesses and does not just reward strengths. An explanation is given, for example, as to why a candidate failed to achieve the next band, when on borderlines. This aspect of the application of the criteria is particularly important, where there is bunching of marks, to distinguish separate performances.

## **Internal Standardisation Procedures**

Good practice is to use cross moderation of groups, joint marking exercises, reorganisation of groups for assessment and department Inset training using filmed evidence, provided by OCR.

The majority of centres had secure and often rigorous procedures in place, but again worryingly, a minority of centres had to be reminded of their responsibilities. Centres must have procedures in place to ensure that internal marking is standardised and that a reliable rank order of marks is sent to the moderator – please see form GCW330 on the website. Importantly, the internally set standard is judged against the agreed OCR Standard, by the use of filmed assessments from OCR. Internal standards are confirmed by visits to centres. Some centres are failing to judge their own standards against those on the OCR DVD.

## **Administration**

The administration of this unit could have been smoother. Centres must familiarise themselves with the deadlines and procedures pertinent to this unit.

Time was wasted, and the moderation process protracted, by the need to chase centres for samples and forms. Some centres are waiting for moderators to select the sample. For this unit the sample is centre-selected. Centres must submit **all** paperwork (candidates' records, together with the moderator's copy of the mark sheets, a signed Centre Authentication form and a completed Internal Standardisation record) to the moderator **at the same time** as they submit the whole cohort's marks for Speaking and Listening. Detailed instructions for submission of marks and paperwork are contained in the Admin Guide and can also be found in the *Speaking and Listening Instructions* document (CWI769) stored under 'Forms' here on the website:

[http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse\\_2010/english/english\\_lang/documents/index.html](http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gcse_2010/english/english_lang/documents/index.html)

Standard deadlines are 10<sup>th</sup> January for the January session and 15<sup>th</sup> May for the June session.

As centres increasingly move to systems where non-subject-specialist examination officers are the point of reference and dispatchers of moderation material, it is vital for the smooth running of the process that instructions regarding procedures are read, understood and carried out by all relevant parties.

Again, attention is drawn to the OCR website for instructions, a checklist of what to send and copies of all relevant forms; this is in addition to the paper versions sent to centres.

However, grateful acknowledgement is made to those who got it right and enabled moderators to meet their deadlines.

## **Conclusion**

Finally, as centres become more familiar with task setting to meet the new requirements and confident in applying the new performance criteria, this unit should develop successfully, with opportunities for candidates to achieve.

Attention is strongly drawn to OCR's Training and Guidance DVD for this unit. The 2011 – 2012 DVD is due to be issued to centres in late September 2011. These DVDs are to be produced annually and will continue to provide vital support for all centres, in assessment and task setting.

## A680 Information and Ideas

### Foundation Tier

#### General Comments

The question paper proved to be accessible and of an appropriate level of demand for the tier. Candidates clearly engaged with the reading material, on volcanoes, for Section A. The two optional Writing questions were found to be equally popular choices.

Candidates had on the whole been clearly prepared for the format of the question and answer booklet used at Foundation Tier. They should be reminded that the spaces provided for answers reflect the relative weightings of questions. Three pages are provided for the Writing answer, but it is not expected that candidates fill all three pages with their responses. It was in fact encouraging to see many candidates devote space (and time) to planning their response.

If candidates feel the need to write more than the space in the booklet provides, they should do so on additional sheets of examination paper (appropriately headed and attached to the booklet by means of a treasury tag). They should not write outside the spaces provided in the actual booklet.

The A680 Information and Ideas paper is similar in content to the legacy 2431 Non-fiction, Media and Information paper. A significant difference is the increased weighting for Writing, up from a third to half of the paper. It was clear that the majority of candidates took due note of this weighting.

#### Individual Questions

##### Section A – Non-Fiction and Media

##### Question 1

1(a) – 1(c). Question 1 begins with a number of questions requiring short responses. This session there were three questions, each requiring two short answers. The space for answers is deliberately restricted, to signal to candidates a relative brevity in their answers. Selective copying is acceptable for these questions, though verbatim copying of excessive chunks of text is not. Candidates need to read the question carefully, as clear directions are given about the specific parts of the text from which the answers will come. Some incorrect answers were the result of not reading the question with sufficient care.

1(d). Examiners saw a range of answers to this question. Many candidates were able to identify a number of relevant points from the extract. Successful responses focused throughout on the 'effects' of the massive eruption and made laudable attempts to use their own words where they could. Less successful responses tended to lift material from the extract without focusing clearly on the 'effects' mentioned in the question. Such responses contained much that candidates had learned about the massive eruption generally rather than its effects.

It is worthwhile in the early days of this specification to repeat the guidance offered in the January 2011 report: *'As is customary with this type of question, it was possible for clearly focused responses to Q1(d) to gain higher marks with fewer points than responses which had more points but which, to varying degrees, were more reliant on the original wording of the text. The strategy of altering the occasional word will not lead to high reward; although this appears to offer a little more than slavish copying, it is an approach that still relies heavily on lifting from the original text.'*

There were some instances of candidates (who clearly understood the extract) adopting an analytical approach more suitable for, and tested in, Question 2b. Candidates are not invited in this question to quote and comment on the use of language.

## Question 2

This question covers similar territory to the Media question in the legacy 2431 paper. The principal difference is that two part-questions are provided in the new A680 paper. The first deals with aspects of presentation – here, headings and pictures; the second with the effects of information and language used. This split has clearly been to the advantage of candidates, helping them to manage their time more effectively.

2(a). Candidates should be reminded of the need to identify *specific* features and then to go on to comment on the *particular* effects they create for a reader. A less successful approach in evidence was to produce generalised comment that could be true of most media texts: eg 'headings are in bold and make us want to read on', 'the colour pictures capture the attention of the reader'. Some answers simply repeated features rather than analysed their effects; eg 'paralysed means the planes are paralysed and this word makes you interested'. Q2(a) is weighted at 6 out of 20 marks, and space is provided accordingly.

Q2(b). This question is weighted at 14 out of 20 marks. More space is provided for answers to Question 2(b), though candidates should try to be selective rather than exhaustive. Stronger responses included evidence of the ability to analyse, commenting specifically on the ways in which information and words and phrases conveyed the power of the volcanic eruption and its effects. For example, one candidate wrote that the word 'chaos' suggested 'a lot of people running round like headless chickens, unable to do anything about the power of the ash cloud'. Thoughtful, personal comment on the effects of a few carefully-selected words and phrases is a better strategy than a mechanical listing of words or devices without commenting on specific effects. A number of candidates spent time merely spotting examples of alliteration, the rule of three or adjectives (sometimes incorrectly). Others listed words from the text and offered little more than a generalised comment such as 'these are negative words'.

Generalised points about the writing's ability to draw the reader in or make the reader feel as if she were there cannot lead to high reward. Examiners felt that candidates would benefit from the frequent opportunities to practise this type of analytical question.

## Section B – Writing

### Questions 3 and 4

Most candidates engaged successfully with their chosen task, which were of roughly equal popularity. There was little evidence of rushed final answers. All candidates should be encouraged to adopt the effective planning strategies evident in many of the more successful responses. In these, candidates had taken time to produce a plan, usually in the form of a bulleted list or mind map. It was noticeable that these candidates went on to produce writing which was on the whole clearly and engagingly expressed and also carefully-structured. There was often a purposeful introduction and interesting development leading to a satisfying conclusion. Those who did not plan tended to produce writing that was rambling and repetitive, with little focus on the actual question. It was not surprising that those who wrote at excessive length often made the greatest number of spelling and punctuation errors. Among the latter were the inability to mark the ends of sentences and also the random use of capital letters. The pronoun 'I' was very often written in lower case, and there were some instances of 'ur' (instead of 'your'). Numerals were routinely used in expressions such as 'in 5 mins' or '8 GCSEs'.

Candidates should not feel they have to use all the space available for their response just because it is there. They should use some time towards the end of the examination to proof-read their answers, and make necessary amendments.

Responses to Question 3 included many tales of trips to the airport, holidays and party arrangements going awry. Most answers included an explanation of feelings, and the opportunity to write about something going wrong led to lively accounts often with a sense of genuine tension leading up to the disaster.

For Question 4, successful responses were interesting and often heart-felt. In general, the format of 'a speech to your class' was attempted with at least some success, with responses demonstrating an awareness of audience and appropriate register. Some examiners commented on valiant attempts to use linguistic devices that didn't quite come off: eg 'It makes me so angry, annoyed and aggravated'.

## Higher Tier

### General Comments

Examiners reported that many candidates showed a clear understanding of the reading passages and engaged thoughtfully with the questions, their responses demonstrating a secure understanding of their content and an appreciation of the writers' techniques and purposes. Many answers to both tasks in Section B were well-structured, focused and a pleasure to read – many Examiners felt that a large number of candidates performed better in the writing task. In general, responses to this paper covered the complete range of achievement, although there were fewer responses at the very highest level than is usually the case with an examination at this level, possibly due to this being a predominantly Year 10 entry. Centres may wish to take this into consideration when they are deciding on their entry policy for future cohorts. Similarly, there was some indication that a higher percentage of candidates than has been the case in previous specifications were inappropriately entered for the Higher Tier paper. Entry for the Foundation Tier externally-examined unit will not preclude the award of an overall grade B for English or English Language, and some borderline C/D candidates may be better served by taking this route than by struggling with the requirements of the Higher Tier paper.

Examiners commented that the paper was appropriate in terms of length, readability, vocabulary and tasks set and that the candidates found the subject matter engaging. Overall, most candidates found the tasks accessible and there was little evidence that they were unable to answer all questions adequately within the time allowed. There was some indication that time was not always effectively organised between the two Sections of the paper. This was apparent in two main (and contrasting) ways. A minority of candidates wrote very little in response to the three reading tasks in Section A and then at great length for the writing task in Section B. This approach, inevitably, proved counter-productive as their responses to Section A were frequently limited in relevant points and, at times, wrongly focused; on the other hand, the attempts at the writing tasks were often unplanned and loosely structured and, the longer they went on, the more inaccurate the linguistic expression became. Another minority of candidates adopted the opposite approach and wrote answers of considerable length to Section A, which in many cases consisted of little more than paraphrase and description of the contents and appearance of the passages in the Reading Booklet Insert, and then produced very brief and undeveloped writing responses. It should be emphasised that although the total marks allocated to each section are equal, there are three discrete reading tasks that require a substantial amount of reading of unseen printed material, whereas candidates are required to attempt only one writing task for which a total of about 350-450 words is adequate. Teachers are, therefore, advised to encourage their candidates to apportion their time accordingly when sitting this paper.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Section A Reading

##### Question 1

*Read the article 'Wing and a Prayer' by Piers Townley.*

*Referring carefully to the article **outline concisely** what makes the experience of flying in a Pitts Special so exciting.*

**Use your own words** as far as possible.

In general, responses to this task were relevant and contained a range of appropriate points. However, only a small minority of candidates showed a sufficient overview and identified a sufficiently wide range of points to achieve marks in the Band 3 range and above. Examiners felt that most candidates had a secure understanding of the passage, but that their understanding of



the requirements of the task was less secure. Responses tended to fall, broadly, into three categories. The most successful focused clearly on the key requirement of the task, which was to state the details contained in the passage that communicated the excitement of flying in a *Pitts Special*. Responses at this level selected a range of points, such as: the speed at which the plane flies very low; the extreme manoeuvrability of the plane; the experience of increasing G forces; the stunts that can be performed and the experience of performing the loop; and expressed these concisely (but not so briefly as to blur the details of the points) in a way that was clearly focused on the requirements of the question.

Less successful responses fell into two main categories: some were simply far too short, consisting of no more than two or three lines and containing only a couple of relevant points which were so baldly stated that there was no indication of an overview of the topic; other responses were too long and frequently off-task because either they attempted an impressionistic, creative piece in the first person, imitative of the writer's experience; or they approached the task as if it were Q2, writing a quasi-analysis; or they digressed into their own (imported) views of what made the experience so exciting; or they virtually paraphrased the whole extract.

Centres are advised to emphasise to their candidates that this task tests summary-writing skills. Careful reading of both the passage and the wording of the question, and note making of appropriate points taken from the passage, are therefore essential stages in writing a successful response. Of all the questions in this paper, this is the one that requires the most detailed planning from candidates before they start to write their final answer.

## Question 2

*Piers Townley says, 'being airborne doesn't get much better than this.' How does the presentation of the article and the writer's use of language help to convey this impression to the reader?*

Most candidates wrote at adequate length in response to this question and some showed a clear appreciation of how both the presentation of the article and the language used by Piers Townley conveyed his sense of exhilaration to the readers. There were a good number of thoughtful attempts to deal with the ways in which the photographs associated with the article helped to convey the sense of excitement and these were supported by some thoughtful analytical attempts (as well as some more fanciful ones, usually related to the blue background of the main picture to which was imputed a range of connotations such as calmness, excitement, fear or a sense of cold). A large number of responses only made valid comments in relation to the pictures, with no references to the writer's language which was a central requirement of the task. It was, therefore, not possible to reward these attempts with marks higher than in the Band 4 range. When reference was made to the language it was frequently in the form of device spotting, with candidates earnestly hunting down examples of the 'rule of three', rhetorical questions etc. The least successful responses consisted of nothing but a list of the terms that might have been used by a writer but without quoting any examples of their use in the passage; middle range responses frequently quoted from the passage but did little more than follow them with assertions such as 'this draws the reader in/makes the reader want to read on' without either attempting to explain how or why this effect was achieved or how the chosen quotation conveyed the excitement of flying the *Pitts Special* to the reader. The most successful responses both quoted appropriately from the passage and explained how the selected quotation illustrated the writer's sense of excitement.

Centres are advised to encourage their candidates to ensure that their answers to this (and to Task 3) are closely focused on the terms of the question and that any references made are explained in these terms. It was clear that candidates had been thoroughly coached regarding attempted analysis, as evidenced by the numerous references to (eg): graphology; text to picture ratio (estimates varied enormously); 'a rise in cadence'; 'a decrease in cadence';

metaphors/similes; 'hard facts'/'soft facts'; font sizes; paragraphs; sub-headings; colours (eg red for danger, white for calmness); strong adjectives (which were sometimes adverbs) and lists (which somehow made things more exciting). Unfortunately, a very large number of candidates did not attempt to check whether these details were, in fact, relevant to the particular question that was set. Responses to this task can be significantly improved and developed by candidates asking themselves the simple questions 'Why?' or 'How?' after every statement they make and then answering these questions as the next stage of their analysis. It should also be borne in mind that while comments on the effectiveness of photographs in furthering a writer's intention are perfectly valid, technical details about the appearance of these photographs is not relevant to this paper.

A few candidates treated Question 1 and Question 2 as if they were the same task – indeed, as if they were part 1 and part 2 of the same task. Centres are advised to ensure that their candidates are fully aware that these are, in fact, discrete tasks.

### **Question 3**

*Read the passage 'Why we no longer enjoy flying' by Nigel Tisdall.*

*How does Nigel Tisdall convey to the reader his views on the experience of flying?*

*In your answer, refer to the language he uses and the way he presents his ideas.*

With the exception of the comments relating to the pictures, much of what was said about Task 2 above has equal relevance to candidates' responses to this question.

Those candidates who appreciated that Tisdall's attitude to the experience of airports and the behaviour of the people to be found in them was in contrast to his views about the actual experience of flying in a plane, generally performed well and supported this understanding with appropriate references to the passage. However, those who misunderstood the initial references to jars of mustard and queues at security usually failed to appreciate the effect of the almost lyrical descriptions of flying over the Alps or the view from a plane's window while being stacked over London and consequently produced responses that showed, at best, only a partial understanding of the writer's views.

On the whole, however, it was encouraging to note that many candidates were able to identify some variety of tone and to highlight the contrast between the 'then' and 'now' of the flying experience.

When preparing for this unit, candidates are advised that the key word in question 1 is 'what' and that in question 2 is 'how'. However, all tasks in Section A test understanding of both the reading passages and the questions set on them. Many candidates' answers for Tasks 2 and 3 would have improved significantly had they made clear both to themselves and to the Examiner, at the start of their answer, what, for example, Nigel Tisdall's views about flying actually were, before going on to explain how he conveyed them. Such an approach would have resulted in much more clearly focused responses.

## **Section B Writing**

### **Question 4**

*Is it important for humans to fly?*

*Write the words of a talk to your class giving your views.*

**OR**

**Question 5**

*Write about a time when something did not go as planned.*

The majority of candidates produced their best performances in the writing tasks for Section B and the two tasks appeared to have been attempted in equal proportion. There were many well written responses which contained much evidence of careful planning prior to writing.

The use of the speech format was very successful. Weaker answers digressed into areas of why we all need a holiday with plenty of global warming information. Stronger answers often drew on material in the reading extracts and conveyed in their own words the excitement of flight and the need to value the experience. Sense of structure was better evidenced here than in the previous session.

There were some lovely pieces on Question 5, much better organised and crafted than in January – although the need to start each account with the alarm clock going off is still compelling. There were plenty of broken limbs, missing birthday cakes and cancelled fights – with clever use of Tisdall's airport experience. Responses relating to the importance of flying were handled well in terms of content and organisation, with most adopting a convincing oral register. There were some pleasingly original pieces where planned days ended by being more exciting and special than expected. A few attempted highly imaginative situations and really tried to offer short stories where, for example, planned invasion of a space colony went wrong. Such responses generally fell short of expectations and had hasty, unconvincing endings due to pressure of time.

As mentioned in the introduction to this report, some responses went on at too great (and unplanned) length and candidates are reminded of the importance of planning this task and focusing their points so that they are conveyed clearly to a reader. Similarly, concentration on careful and precise vocabulary choices, structured paragraphing and a consistent awareness of the need both to write in a register appropriate to a public examination and to observe the conventions of correct spelling and punctuation are central to achieving a creditable result in this section of the paper. Centres are strongly advised to reinforce to candidates that accuracy does matter and also to emphasise to candidates that legible handwriting is important – although the standard of handwriting is not a criterion in the writing mark scheme, it should be noted that the process of attempting to decipher partially illegible answers inevitably impedes an Examiner's impression of what is being expressed in the essay.

In conclusion, Examiners felt that they saw much good work in the scripts that they marked and that there is much to look forward to in the work of Year 11 candidates who will be taking this unit in future examination series.

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