



GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE (NEW)
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

NOVEMBER 2020

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UNIT 1: ORACY

General Comments

The majority of the entries for this series were re-sits with many re-submitting tasks from the summer 2020 series. There were some new submissions, but the profile of entries was fairly limited, with most in the mid-range and few in the higher Band 4 and Band 5 areas. There were some in the lower range, but often because of only completing one of the tasks. There were no instances of incorrect tasks, which for the Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) task were: 'Vegetarianism – should we all eat green?'; 'Should mobile phones be banned in schools?' and 'What is the future of the Welsh language?'. There was one group which discussed 'Is there fairness in the world?' which had no connection to any of the tasks provided and there was no explanation for this anomaly.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

Schools and Colleges were required to upload their record sheets, candidates' notes and recordings onto Surpass. This was the first time this system had been used for this unit and while a good proportion of the recordings and record sheets were provided on time, a significant number were not. There were many cases where record sheets were either not provided or were not signed by the teachers, which meant further delays. It was noted that in many cases notes were not sent when it was apparent from either the manner of the recording or the comments in the record sheets that they had been used. This is an ongoing issue that is made more difficult when recordings are in audio form.

A significant number of candidates had notes referred to WJEC as being far too detailed and, in a number of cases, amounting to scripts which were read. Yet again, I must reiterate for the Individual Researched Presentation, **'It is not permissible for the presentation to be scripted. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate'**. For Group Discussions, it is also clearly stated that, **'No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task.'**

These messages have been a feature of virtually every report in recent years. Incomplete recordings, where a candidate has not undertaken both tasks, should be replaced with complete candidates' work. There were some instances of candidate work not being available for moderation. Centres are reminded that both tasks must be securely backed-up to avoid candidates having to complete new NEA work.

In many cases candidates were very clearly identified at the beginning of their recording with either the candidate or a teacher giving the date of the recording, the centre number and name, the candidate's full name and examination number and the theme and topic of the presentation and the chosen task for the group discussion. This is a requirement which not all centres are adhering to, particularly regarding the date of the recordings. There was also a significant number of instances where individuals in groups were not identified other than the teacher saying who they were rather than them introducing themselves and without reference to names during the discussion, which made assessment very difficult, especially with audio-only recordings.

It was pleasing to see that many more centres were using three candidates for the Group Discussion tasks, which allowed better interaction between candidates. There were still some centres where the group discussion used four, five or even six candidates and where identification, when this was an audio recording, was difficult. Where these were single sex groups with similar voices it became almost impossible to distinguish between the speakers. Centres should be mindful of this and try to ensure either a mix of candidates or use an audio-visual recording which makes judgement of participation much more straightforward and fairer. There also appeared to be more centres using a paired situation for candidates, which in most cases was not helpful as there appeared to be little opportunity for real discussion. There were quite a number of cases where a teacher provided the second person in a discussion and also cases where the teacher managed the group very tightly, to the extent that the discussion became a question and answer session rather than any interaction between the candidates or between the candidate and the teacher. This is not ideal and certainly not in the spirit of the task. On the other hand, there were some occasions when teachers intervened to promote more discussion which was clearly helpful to less able or less confident candidates. Judging whether to intervene or not is a delicate balance.

Timings for the tasks were generally appropriate, though there were still instances of brevity in both tasks. A large number of candidates were not given an opportunity to answer questions which would have enhanced some performances which were rather stilted in presentation. There were fewer instances of tasks going significantly beyond the time frames required but this was still an issue which in most cases was self-penalising. This was particularly the case for the Group Discussions where a significant number were in excess of fifteen minutes, with the longest being almost thirty minutes. This does not encourage incisive comment but rather rambling and repetitive participation.

In general, the record sheets were detailed and used a combination of criteria related comment and task/candidate specific comment. The best used examples of some of the vocabulary used and, for the group discussions which were audio recordings, often gave the opening words of the candidate or noted whether they spoke first, second etc., which was very helpful. Those less successful simply copied brief parts of the criteria with no reference to the specific performances.

Task setting

Individual Researched Presentations

The full range of topics was used, and it was pleasing to note that many candidates chose topics of real personal interest and spoke with some passion. There was challenge here, with topics such as abortion, why young people should travel, social media as a double-edged sword, climate change and ambitions for future employment all providing thought-provoking work. Many candidates also chose to speak about hobbies and interests, often showing real insight into the demands of sporting and other leisure activities. Those who went beyond straightforward information and tried to evaluate aspects clearly achieved more. There was some focus on payment of sportsmen and sportswomen and the appeal of holidaying in Wales. I particularly enjoyed listening to a presentation – as if from the experience of a Russian citizen – of the change in life in Russia and the influences of the western world.

It was pleasing that most candidates appeared to have had a free choice rather than being restricted by a 'one size fits all' choice of topic. There were a number of candidates who spoke on aspects of social media and then discussed whether mobile phones should be banned in schools, which often resulted in repeating similar arguments about cyberbullying and addiction to screens.

Despite messages to the contrary and exemplar materials available on the WJEC website, there are still far too many candidates who are being allowed to use very detailed prompts or scripts which are clearly being read. Should this occur, candidates' marks must be awarded accordingly, but, ideally, they should be given guidance on how to use brief prompts. Also, there is a tendency to think that many statistics are needed to support their opinions and often these add little to the overall piece. An honest and enthusiastic presentation on a topic of personal interest is the best option rather than a topic which requires much research and is really of little concern to the candidate.

Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion)

It was pleasing to note that many more of the group discussions limited the group sizes to three candidates (although, disappointingly, there were still examples of groups of five or six) and also mixed the groups rather than having single sex groups. There were more centres which provided audio-visual recordings for this task which made identification of the participants very straightforward. I was extremely impressed at how many centres had utilised technology to record remotely from candidates' homes when attendance at a centre was made difficult by restrictions of the pandemic.

However, there were still far too many examples of discussions which had clearly been rehearsed and sometimes read as polite exchanges with very detailed scripts being used. This is an area which has been highlighted many times and the Instructions for Teachers is absolutely clear: **'No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task'**. Where groups were able to interact more freely, genuine exchanges of views were apparent.

All three topics were used with perhaps more candidates looking at 'Vegetarianism – should we all eat green?' and 'Should mobile phones be banned in schools?'. Both topics clearly engaged the candidates and they were able to give a range of opinions, though perhaps over-burdened at times with statistics. 'What is the future of the Welsh language?' was probably the least popular but when used provoked some interesting and revealing comments about the relevance of the language to the candidates' lives.

This area is still one where candidates need practice in interacting with each other and learning how to sustain an argument. The over-reliance on detailed notes and the increased use of actual scripts is a worrying development in an area which is a real life-skill for candidates and also furnishes them with the ability to make and sustain an argument. This is a transferable skill for the written papers and certainly an area which would benefit from more practice and less detailed preparation.

Assessment

Overall, the assessments were generally sound and there was clearly some attempt to moderate the recordings before marks were submitted in some cases. Where there were discrepancies these arose because marks did not always reflect brevity of performances, limitations of content or reading of scripts. Internal moderation inevitably raised marks, often unjustifiably. Audio-visual recordings were transparent and generally much more accurately assessed. Audio recordings frequently did not recognise – or penalise – the reading of material in the marks awarded.

Candidates who gave an Individual Researched Presentation lasting under two minutes and then answered one or two straightforward questions were unlikely to achieve marks above the lower end of Band 3 at best. Similarly, a member of a Group Discussion who only made two or three brief contributions – often as a result of there being too many people in the group, because it was a brief discussion or because they had to be prompted to respond – cannot move beyond Band 2 marks. In these instances, marks were often very generously awarded. Candidates who did little more than provide information on a topic were also often generously rewarded when there was little or no evidence of evaluation or analysis – skills required for Band 3 and above.

Allowing candidates to select topics of personal interest and encouraging good practice in terms of use of brief notes for the Individual Researched Presentation are still areas for improvement. For the Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) task, candidates need to practise the art of arguing and discussing with each other in order to develop this essential life skill.

Summary of key points

- Reading of scripts or very detailed prompts continued to be an issue for both the Individual Researched Presentation and the Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) task. Notes were often not sent to moderators, which led to some lack of transparency when recordings were audio rather than audio-visual.
- Topics for the Individual Researched Presentations were varied and best when playing to the candidates' strengths and interests rather than being imposed as a standard task for the whole group.
- It was very pleasing that the majority of the Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion) tasks used groups of three, which was advantageous to candidates, and were more likely to be recorded in audio-visual format, enabling moderators to see interaction between the participants such as tacit agreement.

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UNIT 2: DESCRIPTION, NARRATION AND EXPOSITION

General Comments

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. Five reading texts of different types were set for this examination. All reading texts were based on the theme of Insects.

This was a typical GCSE English Language examination, providing a range of task types and a balance of continuous and non-continuous texts. All texts were selected in response to the chosen theme. Prior knowledge of the topic will have made little difference to the skills being tested or the outcomes achieved. Overall, the question papers seemed well received and there was clear evidence of candidate engagement with both the reading material and the tasks. The texts proved accessible to the majority of candidates and there was no shortage of effort made to engage with the content. Very few candidates appeared unwilling to engage with the examination paper and the general impression from examiners was that most candidates worked hard to apply themselves.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Reading

A1. How many types of insect are there in the UK?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

As ever, the first question of the paper was partly designed to provide a straightforward introduction to the first text and also the theme of the examination. The text was an infographic taken from a nature blog which provided general information about insects. This was a useful introduction to the theme and provided information that could form a sound basis for retrieval and verbal reasoning questions.

The first question was designed to be a straightforward location question and required candidates to locate the fact that there are '27,000 types of insect in the UK'. As expected, the vast majority were able to select the correct information, which was contained in the opening section of the text. There were very few instances of candidates entering incorrect answers. Occasionally, examiners reported that candidates had copied down the number incorrectly, usually this was either by missing or adding a digit to the number. Such answers were not worthy of credit and it is worth a reminder that care must be taken when copying down information. Candidates would be well advised to double-check that what they have written is exactly what they think they found in the text.

Overall, this question allowed a very significant proportion of candidates to engage with the text, isolate the pertinent information and answer the question.

A2. Which one of the following statements is NOT true?

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning and deduction skills to analyse information.

This question presented candidates with a choice of four multiple-choice options and required them to isolate the statement that was incorrect. All of the statements were based on information from the text although the untrue statement specified that ‘an invertebrate is an animal with a backbone’ when a reading of the text confirmed that the reverse is true and ‘an animal without a backbone is known as an invertebrate’. It was essential that candidates read the question carefully and were certain of what they were being asked to do, in addition to carefully reading the whole of the text.

This was a straightforward task and overall success rates were very high. As ever, there was a small minority of candidates who did not seem to understand that they were only being asked to tick one of the answers (as suggested by the instruction ‘Tick (✓) that box’) and persisted in ticking multiple boxes. Clearly for this question, these answers were ineligible for credit.

A3. List two facts that you learn about insects.

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

This question required candidates to engage with all of the information presented by the text and extract two facts about insects. There was a wealth of options to choose from and most were able to achieve the maximum two marks on this question. Engagement with the question and the text were key to answering correctly.

For those candidates who failed to score here, in the majority of cases it was because they copied chunks of information directly (and unselectively) from the text which did not necessarily answer the question. For example, some candidates copied general information such as ‘an animal without a backbone is known as an invertebrate’ which did not demonstrate clear understanding that an insect is such an animal. Clearly those candidates who indicated that an insect is an invertebrate had applied what they had read and were able to earn a mark. Some of the more easily accessed features of an insect (that were listed in bullet points on the page), at times were overlooked in favour of unselective or inaccurate copying. It is important that candidates are directed to engage with all of the content in a text.

A4. Read the first paragraph.

What insect-related foods do people in the UK eat?

This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Text B was a continuous piece of writing adapted from a news article about eating insects that was published on the BBC website. On the whole, the text provided fairly positive information about the possibility of humans eating insects.

Question A4 instructed candidates to read the first paragraph to enable them to answer. A candidate’s ability to engage with the information presented and then offer a clear and focused answer was being tested. Up to two marks were on offer for the identification of two or more insect-related foods that are consumed by people in the UK. The answers could all be found in the mid-section of the paragraph and for most this proved a straightforward task. The majority were certainly able to make some progress here.

A minority of candidates failed to score here. In many cases, this was because they had ignored the instruction to focus on the first paragraph and provided information that could be found in other areas in the text. Elsewhere, some candidates appeared to struggle to interpret the information relating to cochineal bugs. It was not sufficient to state 'cochineal bugs' as an answer to this question as this did not get to the nub of the question which asked for 'insect-related food'. For candidates to score a mark in relation to cochineal bugs it was imperative that they mention the 'pink-purple food colouring' made from cochineal bugs, which is the 'insect-related food' that people eat.

A5. What is meant by the use of the word 'efficient' in the third paragraph?

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning, inference and deduction skills.

This was presented as a multiple-choice question and it proved reasonably straightforward although there were credible distractors included within the possible answer selections which will undoubtedly have led some candidates to choose incorrectly. It was essential that candidates read the text and question carefully to ensure that they considered the context of the word 'efficient'. The third answer, 'achieving great productivity with little wasted effort', was the correct answer, and this could be inferred from a careful reading of Text B.

All of the distractors received some interest from candidates but, as would be expected, the first option was the next most popular choice. It is important to remember that not all of the distractors will present an obvious 'wrong' answer, a decision often needs to be made by those sitting the examination as to which definition works best in the context that is presented.

A6. Explain why eating crickets may not be the answer to the world's food problems.

This question tested the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information in more challenging writing and to refer to evidence within texts.

Text C was the second continuous piece of writing in the examination. It was adapted from an article in a current affairs magazine and discussed the possibility that the consumption of insects would not necessarily offer the environmentally friendly solutions that have been suggested elsewhere. The article was written as a result of the findings of research into the diets and protein production capabilities of crickets. Text C offered more challenging writing at this mid-stage of the reading examination.

Successful answers to this question needed to demonstrate the ability to explain what had been read in order to demonstrate why the consumption of crickets may not be the answer to the world's food problems. The ideas presented by the text were undoubtedly quite tricky to grasp and, as expected, not all candidates were able to demonstrate the required skills. Many did make some progress here though, and proved that there were many different ways to explore the fact that the research had provided 'disappointing results' in relation to the efficiency of crickets when compared to chickens.

Understanding the complexities of why that was the case and providing an explanation that covered all of the possibilities of the mark scheme was beyond all but the most able, but attempt rates were high and some progress was often made.

Those who failed to earn marks here were often those who did not address the need to explain. A few noted down very brief bullet points of content which did not fulfil the requirements of the question. Elsewhere examiners reported some candidates struggling with a lack of understanding and/or misreading of the text, for example demonstrating concern over the chickens having enough to eat or worrying about the germ-spreading of insects fed on 'food waste'.

A7. Compare what the writers of Text B and Text C say about the possible benefits of eating insects.

This question tested the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and compare and evaluate the usefulness, relevance and presentation of content.

This was a high tariff question and, as would be expected, the comparative element provided robust challenge. Candidates were required to compare the information presented in Text B and Text C in relation to the very specific focus on the 'possible benefits' of eating insects.

Candidates who paid close attention to the focus of the question were often able to present a decent range of points and many accumulated marks. Text B offered quite an extensive range of accessible points in relation to the 'possible benefits of eating insects' and many were able to make some progress on this text. There were perhaps fewer points to consider in relation to Text C but there was certainly a reasonable number of ideas that were worthy of consideration in relation to the task. Those candidates who kept the task firmly in mind in their discussions on both Texts will undoubtedly have given themselves the best chance of scoring well here.

Unfortunately, there were a number of areas where candidates struggled or will have missed the opportunity to move through the marking Bands. As ever, some candidates did not read the question carefully and offered a more general comparison of both articles and/or the idea of eating insects. Some candidates opted to try to identify and compare the respective purposes of the texts or the writers' use of techniques and again these did not respond to the focus of the question. Other candidates managed to sustain their focus on the question when looking at Text B but not with their work on Text C, rendering their answers somewhat imbalanced. All of these candidates, to varying degrees, will have found it difficult to accumulate marks. Candidates who do not respond to the focus of the question cannot be considered 'on task' and this is reflected in the marks that have been awarded.

As always, examiners were advised not to be prescriptive in terms of the structure of answers. Candidates employ different and equally valid ways to set out an answer to this question and all candidates will have been assessed on the merits of the content of their answer.

A8. What percentage of the world's wild flowers do bees pollinate?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

This low tariff question provided an introduction to Text D, which was an infographic about the importance of honey bees. This text was the second non-continuous text on the examination and the first to focus specifically on the subject of bees.

The information required to answer this question could be located beneath the heading 'How many of the world's wild flowers do they pollinate?' There were very few candidates who did not locate the correct percentage. A very small minority incorrectly wrote down the first percentage to be found in the text, a statistic of '70%' that related to the number of 'food crops' pollinated by bees, but examples of this were relatively few and far between.

A9. Write down two ways in which bees medically help human beings.

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.

Successful answers to this question demonstrated a clear focus on what they were being asked. The possible answers could all be located in the block of text to the bottom left of the infographic and the majority of candidates did locate the right area of text. Again, there was a good response and achievement rate for this question and very few barriers to success.

Where candidates did not achieve either one or two marks for this question it was often because they did not make a clear link between bees and the way in which they can medically help. Answers which were vague or missed out key information were unable to be credited. For example, candidates who described how antibiotics could be used to help burn victims but did not make the necessary link between antibiotics and honey did not demonstrate sufficient awareness of the question and were not credited.

A10. What does the text mean when it states that 'one-third of our total diet is dependent on insect-pollinated plants?'

This question tested the ability to interpret meaning.

This was a demanding question which provided challenge to candidates and there was a real range of both correct and incorrect answers. Successful answers were able to demonstrate an understanding of our reliance on insect-pollinated plants for our nutritional requirements. Candidates needed to be able to interpret the phrase and demonstrate their understanding through brief explanation. There were many approaches taken to this question but the best answers were clear and tried to engage with the phrase and its context.

It was clear that some struggled to interpret the quotation and were unable to offer a valid explanation. There was a variety of reasons for this but some were too vague or tended to repeat the words in the question. A few seemed to approach the quote from an unhelpful angle and wanted to explain the importance of the plants to the bees or insects and their diet. Clearly, these did not meet the requirements of the question or mark scheme.

A11. What is meant by the word 'debris' in line 14?

This question tested the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.

This was the first question set on Text E, an extract from a dystopian fiction account of a young bee's arrival into the world. The text was intended to provide candidates with an opportunity to engage with the writer's use of language. The first question was presented as multiple-choice and more than half of candidates answered correctly. The correct answer was the third option 'scattered pieces of rubbish'. Interestingly, the second most popular choice was the second option 'important pieces of wall' which in meaning is quite different to the correct answer, but perhaps does suggest that quite a number of candidates approached this question with little concept or prior awareness of the word 'debris' and were trying to read in context to elicit meaning.

A.12 What impressions does the writer create of Flora 717's arrival and first few hours in the world?

This question tested the ability to refer to evidence within texts and use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information.

This question was designed to be a challenging question based on a reasonably challenging text. In many ways this was a real opportunity for candidates to engage with language and showcase their inferential and analytical skills and examiners reported seeing some genuinely engaging answers. It was a high tariff question, which gave most candidates the opportunity to make some headway even where responding quite generally or in brief.

The most successful answers were produced by candidates who were prepared to really engage with the text and deliver a range of impressions that were supported by relevant evidence and an awareness of how meaning was created. Examiners were instructed to be aware that the indicative content on the mark scheme could not cover all of the varied impressions that might be created by the text or expressed by candidates and to reward well-evidenced and/or well-explored valid alternatives. Many candidates demonstrated clear awareness of the pain and discomfort of Flora's journey into the world, some focusing in really specific detail on aspects of the language that enabled those impressions to be created. There was also impressive focus on the violence of her entrance and the strangeness of the world she encountered.

Unfortunately, there were candidates who struggled to make progress. A few did not grasp the alternate reality described by the passage and struggled with an inaccurate interpretation about a human called Flora. Others resorted to recounting the events of the narrative and thereby failed to engage with the question that had been set. There is a very narrow possibility of reward for candidates who resort to recounting or copying large chunks of a text. Examples of unselective copying or paraphrasing were in evidence for many of the questions on this paper, and that certainly remains true of answers to this question. It is imperative that students are informed of how little there is to be gained by such an approach, time consuming though it sometimes must be. Elsewhere, answers that were extremely brief, and/or quite vague, will also have struggled to move beyond the first or second band on the mark scheme.

A13. Read the paragraph below and then answer the questions that follow:

Jonathan ...(1)... the article on insect repellents with interest. He remembered only too well how painful insect ...(2)... could be.

(a) Circle the word below that best fits the gap (1):

A) saw B) read C) had D) consumed

(b) Circle the word below that best fits gap (2):

A) flies B) bites C) teeth D) injuries

This question tested the ability to understand texts at word level.

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out the appropriate word choices in the context of the sentence presented. Four possible answers were provided to both part (a) and part (b), and candidates were required to choose one answer for each gap. The success rates suggested that the majority were able to complete this with few problems.

A14. Tick (✓) the box of the sentence which is grammatically correct.

- I cannot hardly believe that this is good for you.
- I can hardly believe that this were good for you.
- I cannot hardly believe that this was good for you.
- I cannot believe that this is good for you.

This question tested the ability to understand texts at sentence level.

This question was presented as multiple choice with the fourth answer being correct. The success rates here suggest that most were well equipped to correctly answer this question and the vast majority of candidates selected the correct answer.

A15. Read the text below which consists of sentences in the wrong order and show your understanding by answering the questions that follow:

1. Owen needed a course of antibiotics to fight the infection.
2. Owen was doing some gardening when he was bitten by a horsefly.
3. Over the next few days his hand became pink and swollen.
4. He decided to visit his doctor who explained that his hand was infected.
5. At first, he just put on some antiseptic cream and carried on gardening.

- (a) Which sentence should come **fourth** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]
- (b) Which sentence should come **fifth** in the text? Write the number of the sentence below. [1]

This question tested the ability to understand texts at text level.

As with the previous questions of this type, to answer successfully candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences in order to see which sentences fit best into the required locations. By looking at the sentences individually it may have been possible to come up with various sequences which would appear to make sense. The requirement was to choose the order in which the meaning made the most sense. Again, there was some challenge, but most candidates proved able to determine at least one of these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. Owen was doing some gardening when he was bitten by a horsefly.
2. At first, he just put on some antiseptic cream and carried on gardening.
3. Over the next few days his hand became pink and swollen.
4. He decided to visit his doctor who explained that his hand was infected.
5. Owen needed a course of antibiotics to fight the infection.

Proofreading

- B1.** In this question, as with previous proofreading tasks, candidates were asked to read a text, circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.
This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.

Most candidates were able to make some progress with this question. The text was presented as an unbroken paragraph of continuous writing about the Emperor Dragonfly. Most were able to detect some errors, although there seemed to be relatively few who gained full marks. As with last November, this may well be as a result of the entry pattern of candidates at this time of year with more, on the whole, struggling with aspects of Written Accuracy than we might see in a more standard entry. The potentially unfamiliar vocabulary of 'prey' may also account for the relatively low number of candidates who spotted this particular error.

As with previous examples of this question type, candidates are advised to avoid introducing additional errors whilst making a correction. For example, those who correctly identified 'egg's' as being incorrect but then offered the correction 'eggs' or 'Eggs' were unable to be credited. Candidates must be careful to write the correction exactly as it would appear in the text – changing from lower case to upper case letters, or vice versa, must only happen where that is the error which is being corrected.

Writing

- B2.** Candidates were given a choice of task to complete for this question. They were able to choose between:
- (a) Write an account of a time when you did something for the first time.
 - (b) "It's time for us to start making changes. Let's change the way we eat, let's change the way we live, and let's change the way we treat each other." Tupac Shakur

Write an essay on the subject of change, giving clear reasons and examples.

Both writing tasks proved accessible to candidates and some really enjoyable accounts were produced. In so far as it was possible to tell, there appeared to be a reasonably even split between the two task types and it was clear that candidates had been prepared carefully for both. Across both tasks there was plenty of evidence of careful planning taking place and it was pleasing to see that timing did not appear to be a problem for the vast majority of candidates who proved able to write in some detail. Overall, there appeared to be less evidence of pre-rehearsed work that did not fit either of the given task types in this series. Examiners were delighted that so many candidates were prepared to put significant effort into producing thoughtful work that responded to one of the tasks set. There seemed relatively few occasions where poor timekeeping or a lack of commitment led to brief or ill-conceived writing.

Task (a)

Task (a) was a narration writing task and this produced some really enjoyable accounts. In the main, candidates appeared to write from their own experience but there was a reasonably wide variety of experiences on offer. There were many enjoyable and quite humorous accounts of first driving lessons – some indeed which may have left examiners rather hoping that the candidates were putting their lessons on hyperbole to good use! Other notable ‘firsts’ came in the form of first days at school, first experiences of traveling abroad or playing in sporting events, and first attempts at much-loved hobbies such as horse-riding or dancing. For examiners, it was really interesting to bear witness to the types of ‘firsts’ that candidates remember in enough detail, and with sufficient emotion, to allow them to write at length about them.

The best pieces, as ever, came from those who were able to write convincingly, fluently and with a clear awareness of their reader. In the hands of some candidates, this piece had the power to engage and entertain examiners. Careful planning also appeared to bring rewards which is pleasing given the focus this subject has taken during CPD sessions over the last few years. Examiners reported that those who make sensible use of the planning box appeared to write with more awareness of structure and the outcome of their writing. Obviously, this also adds favourably to the appeal of the writing to a reader.

Task (b)

Task (b) was an exposition task on the subject of change and this also produced some very detailed responses. Candidates were engaged by the task and some were able to effectively draw upon what they had read in the reading section, as well (in some cases) as their own knowledge and perhaps a wider reading of past examination texts, to write convincingly on the subject. The Tupac Shakur quote used as stimulus to the task also appeared to generate enthusiasm from some candidates. Some clearly brought their own knowledge of Shakur to the debate, and there was some interesting wider awareness of his views that, for some, enabled the addition of relevant and interesting detail. Many more though, used the content of the quote as a springboard into looking at their own views and to aid them in the careful structuring of their writing. There were very few candidates who did not have something to say in relation to this subject, and many wrote at length and with commendable passion on areas that they would like to see change in the future.

With both of the writing tasks, Task (a) and Task (b), there were similarities to be found in some of the areas where candidates may have struggled. For example, for both tasks, there were candidates who appeared to have run out of things to write about. Unsurprisingly, these were often the candidates who had not taken advantage of the planning space, or, where used, had done so very briefly. Brief or incomplete work also tended to be self-penalising for both tasks. It is virtually impossible for a candidate to demonstrate the sustained skills required for the higher bands in a very short piece of writing. Those who choose to ignore the recommended minimum length for a Writing piece, do so at great risk to their prospects of reaching the top Bands.

As ever, errors in written accuracy proved a significant area of concern and, as with last November, it became clear that this may have been a recurring issue for many of those who were re-sitting this qualification. Examiners are instructed to underline all errors in written accuracy on a piece of writing and the red 'ink' can be quite stark when viewed on a page. Written work which is characterised by numerous basic errors will struggle to progress through the Bands of the Assessment Criteria. An awareness of basic sentence punctuation (including the use of capital letters and full stops) and the avoidance of comma splicing, as well as work on tense and agreement, are key areas which would benefit from a heightened focus during a candidate's exam preparation. Time spent proof-reading a piece of work for these types of errors would, in many cases, be time spent wisely.

There is one final point to make which perhaps draws attention to the strangeness of the circumstances of assessment this year. It is impossible to predict the circumstances of the candidates who sat these examinations, but despite everything else that may have been going on at the time, we have been delighted by their commitment and effort levels. The examining team would like to commend all candidates for their participation in this series of examinations, the willingness to apply themselves in circumstances way beyond the norm was very much appreciated.

Summary of key points

- There was no shortage of effort from candidates with the vast majority clearly working hard to demonstrate sensible timing skills across the paper.
- One of the main areas for improvement is the comparison question – more purposeful attention to the focus of the question is needed.
- Time spent on developing proofreading skills – both for the proofreading question and to help candidates check their own work – would be time well spent.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCSE (NEW)

November 2020

UNIT 3: ARGUMENTATION, PERSUASION AND INSTRUCTIONAL

General Comments

A breakdown of the Unit 3 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. For this examination, candidates were provided with five different reading texts. All were based on the theme of Random Acts of Kindness.

With a range of text and task types (both continuous and non-continuous), this was a typical GCSE English language examination. Prior knowledge of the topic made no difference to the skills being tested or the positive achievement of outcomes. The texts provided readers with a wealth of positive details about the topic and possible ways of being kind but also introduced the concept that some kindness may be viewed as suspicious or selfish rather than selfless. Candidates seemed to enjoy the topic and perhaps the persuasive element of some of the passages may encourage some young people to reflect on their own actions and future kind acts.

Although the entry numbers were relatively low, across the whole ability range, candidates worked diligently and with enthusiasm. Most carefully considered the most effective use of their time and produced some thoughtful and engaging responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Reading

A1. What does RAoK stand for?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Text A, was a brief, continuous text which served as a general introduction to the topic. The text contained a definition of a Random Act of Kindness (RAoK) and gave an example to exemplify this. The text was accessible and was deliberately included to allow all candidates to immediately engage with the theme.

The first question required candidates to locate and retrieve information. Most were able to successfully write down the meaning of the acronym and were credited for doing so. Candidates were not penalised for the misuse of capital letters, nor were they penalised for making the 'Acts' singular. A minority were not successful when answering this question as they simply copied entire sentences down from the first paragraph of the text rather than selecting specific details.

A2. What example of a Random act of Kindness is given in the text?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Although seemingly straightforward, some precision was required when answering the second question. Most candidates located the correct area of the text and sensibly copied down or paraphrased the correct piece of information. A small minority copied down the information incorrectly or missed out key details. It was essential to comment on the third-party aspect of the kindness in answers and some missed this out, thus failing to achieve credit.

A3. When is Random Act of Kindness week?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

The final task based on Text A was an information retrieval question. To access the mark for this question, candidates were required to write down when Random Act of Kindness Week takes place. The correct answer was the second week in February. Quite a number of candidates were, rather worryingly, unable to copy the correct spelling of February (but were not penalised for doing so). Some were quite imprecise when copying down the information and simply wrote, 'February'. It is important that candidates try to answer as fully as possible when asked a specific question.

A4. Which of the following sentences best describes what is meant by 'The Kindness Chain?'

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

Text B was an information text which exemplified 'The Kindness Chain'. The first question based on this text was the first multiple-choice question to feature on the paper. Four possible answers were provided for candidates to select from. As with all multiple-choice questions, credible distractors were included to increase the demand and challenge of the task. All distractors were potentially sensible actions that linked in some way to isolated words in the phrase. There was, however, only one correct answer which a significant majority selected. As with previous exam series, every care should be taken to present a clearly demarcated final answer. Any corrections should be both clear and legible. No credit was given to candidates who ticked multiple boxes.

A5. Text B shows the Kindness Chain. Put these stages into the order which best shows how you can become a link in the kindness chain.

This question tests the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in sequencing information.

Candidates utilise a range of approaches when tackling sequencing questions. Some try to complete the question at speed by scanning the first word of each sentence and looking for obvious literal clues. This approach, in isolation, is not helpful as some of the context can be lost when reading words without considering the wider implications or meaning. Candidates who read the whole text box and try to sequence the information based on its general meaning help themselves.

Candidates were given the second answer in the sequence to help them complete the stages in this process and were then required to sequence the other three stages. The 'Find out' may have helped those trying to work out the first stage as this suggested it was an initial step in the process. The final stage began with 'Complete' and the following sentence suggested that, by this stage, the first stage of the process (or link) was complete. This left only the third stage which suggested an ongoing consideration of the process and not something to consider at the end.

During CPD sessions and Principal Examiner reports, it has been stressed that candidates must take care in their application of numbers (for example, numbering their responses: 1-3, or 2-5, rather than 1,3 and 4). Some candidates used the same number on more than one occasion (3, 1, 3) and this makes it impossible for examiners to reward the full range of marks available. It is imperative that candidates are careful when completing this task to ensure they optimise the number of marks available to them. Most candidates who used a word processor chose to hand write this answer in the answer booklet, a decision that ensured their answer was clearly and accurately presented. Some typed out the whole sequence anew and this was also eligible for credit.

A6. Explain in your own words, what the phrase ‘chain reaction’ means.

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

Word meaning questions can pose a challenge, especially when candidates are faced with a phrase to interpret rather than a single word. However, these questions are an excellent test of a candidate’s holistic understanding of meaning and they provide some robust challenge. When responding to the phrase, ‘chain reaction’ candidates usually either rooted their response firmly in the text and the topic of kindness or were a little less specific and applied their own knowledge of the phrase (perhaps sometimes based on prior knowledge from science lessons). As long as there was clear engagement with the phrase and an appropriate explanation of its meaning, credit was given. Many candidates who answered correctly began by suggesting that an initial action ‘occurred’ and that this action began the process of the resulting ‘chain reaction’. Some began with a specific explanation of the word ‘reaction’ using vocabulary such as ‘trigger’ or ‘catalyst’ to show that an action took place which initiated a process of events. Many of those who answered successfully finished their answer with an explanation of ‘chain’ to show the ongoing and continual nature of the process. It was pleasing to note that some candidates decided to answer inventively using their own metaphors, likening the process to ‘dominoes’ or ‘loops’ while others were able to see the ‘knock on’ effect of the process.

With such a small entry at this time of the year, we were genuinely surprised to see the wide array of very different responses to this question, many of which were suitable for credit. Candidates worked hard to use the language accessible to them to produce some thoughtful and well considered responses.

A7. Write down the example of a ‘face-to-face’ activity that is given in the text.

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Text C was taken from an article which suggested the benefits associated with helping others. A wealth of information on the types of help that can be offered and the ways that kindness can benefit our own mental wellbeing were presented by the writer. Question 7 required candidates to locate the phrase ‘face-to-face’ in the text and to then write down the example of a face-to-face activity. The example that was given in the text was to ‘volunteer at a drop-in centre’. The word ‘volunteer’ on its own was not sufficient to warrant credit as volunteering is not necessarily a face-to-face activity and can be done without interaction. Some candidates were unselective in their response and omitted the key details, rather focusing on the effect of such volunteering rather than the type. Overall, however, most were careful in their reading and were able to respond appropriately and accurately.

A8. How does the writer try to persuade us that helping others can be beneficial to our own health?

This question tested the ability to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.

This question always requires close reading and considered focus so that candidates are able to see exactly what is required in an answer. This question type is one of the more challenging reading questions and certainly enables candidates to demonstrate their close reading and analytical skills. The introduction to Text C ‘suggested the benefits associated with helping others’ and the task tied in neatly with the aims of the article. There was a wealth of detail which suggested the personal benefits that could be gained by helping others. The language selected by the writer also left a reader with the clear sense of the personal benefits to be gained. The text was the natural choice for this type of question as it gave candidates plenty of opportunities to select a range of details and include some consideration of the text and the writer’s methods.

Spending a few moments to consider the requirements of the task is essential when tackling one of the longer and more demanding reading questions. The focus of the question must be scrutinised so that candidates are able to present an answer which is both relevant and on task. The specific wording of this question which required candidates to consider the personal benefits of helping others was key to success. Being able to access the full range of marks hinges on the close reading of the task. Unfortunately, candidates still lose focus when tackling this type of question. Some simply answer a generic ‘how does the writer’ question without the specific focus required while others go off at a tangent and focus more on the writer’s methods than what is said. A small minority sought to answer a question about why they may choose to ‘read on’ while others focused on the fact that helping others is ‘easy’. Although these may seem like subtle lapses in focus, they can cause a candidate to be classified as ‘struggling to engage’ as they often fail to answer the question when becoming side-tracked by their own agenda or misreading.

The key messages regarding this type of question remain the same across all exam series. ‘How does the writer’ can be answered in different ways but focus on the question is essential. This question does not intend to encourage a relentless hunt for technical devices (or for candidates to be guided by techniques rather than being guided by the question). Instead, the question aims to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer’s arguments and how these are conveyed to the reader (any relevant techniques used can be mentioned and explored but should not be commented on at the expense of focusing on the question). Many who make a decent attempt when answering this question do so by mainly concentrating on the content of the passage. Additionally, those who work chronologically through the text often produce more coherent and methodical responses. Top Band answers always go beyond the spotting of factual content and are not only selective in their choice of material but include concise explanations and comments about the effect of the information. The very best respond to language and consider the ways in which the writer’s argument develops (with a constant eye to the question).

A9. What does a ‘kindness bank’ allow you to do? Select the most appropriate description. Tick the correct box.

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

This was another multiple-choice question. Five possible answers were provided in response to the question. Verbs were chosen carefully for all options to link to the notion of 'banking'. Careful reading was required, but candidates could work through the options eliminating those which were not quite correct. Those who located the phrase in the resource material did themselves a lot of good as the following information suggested its meaning.

A10. Summarise, in your own words how being kind to others can benefit you.

This question tested the ability to summarise information.

Text D was taken from a Christmas blog and presented kindness from a different angle. The writer explored the fact that some kindness can be performed as a form of self-interest but also focused on the wide range of benefits that can be enjoyed by those who are kind. Candidates were asked to summarise how 'being kind to others can benefit you' and the mark scheme for this question was separated into seven possible areas of coverage. Candidates who covered any of these areas were rewarded, according to quality and skill.

The diverse approaches to summary suggest that not all candidates are comfortable with the skill and the question does offer some challenge to many candidates. A good deal of input has been given at CPD/Webinar sessions and in all Principal Examiner Reports to convey a clear message about the most successful approach to summary. Those who require additional information about this skill would also be well advised to consider the OER materials and the Guidance for Teaching.

Feedback from the examining team suggests that many candidates still fail to summarise efficiently. Many insist on using an 'evidence-explain' approach, which is inappropriate for a summary. Others include lengthy quotations and copy huge swathes of text, covering, in some cases, more information than the original text. It becomes abundantly clear when candidates have grasped summary skills as they produce concise and clear responses. The best candidates disentangle the key details and then present these clearly and separately.

Bullet points and continuous text are perfectly acceptable approaches to take when completing a summary. It is also worth reinforcing that candidates will be helped by adopting a chronological approach to their own reading/analysis of the text but that answers can also be presented in any order.

A11. The writer tells us that 'those who give more get more.' What does this phrase suggest?

This question tested the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in context.

For this word meaning question, candidates were asked to deduce the meaning of the phrase 'those who give more, get more'. The phrase can be found in the second paragraph of Text D. Candidates who stepped back from the individual words and tried to present an overview of its meaning, were rewarded. Those who tried to follow the same pattern as the original words (but changed these for suitable synonyms), were also usually accurate. Some candidates struggled to gain credit for this answer as their explanations were simply too close to the original. Using the same verbs as the original phrase, for example, does not necessarily demonstrate the ability to engage with its meaning. It can be difficult to find synonyms for every word and examiners were instructed to use their professional judgement when determining whether there was sufficient understanding to warrant a mark being awarded.

As with question 6, there were some inventive ways of exploring the meaning of the phrase. Candidates used adaptations of common proverbs to aid in their explanations, for example, 'you reap more than you sow' if you are kind. Others focused on the concept of karma and were able to explore how those who are kind are often the recipients of some form of karma to a greater extent than the original deed. It is always pleasing to see those who are genuinely engaged with the topic and are willing to be a little more creative with their language use.

A12. Explain why some people are uncomfortable with random acts of kindness.

This question tested the ability to locate information and to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.

Text E was taken from a magazine article and deliberated whether 'Random Acts of Kindness Bring Happiness'. While still celebrating kindness, the article looked at some of the alternative perceptions surrounding kindness. This question focused on these negative perceptions and asked candidates to explain why some people are uncomfortable when faced with random acts of kindness. Candidates had to work across the text and disentangle the negative perceptions from amongst the positive arguments. The question seemed to offer a suitable level of challenge. Many candidates were able to accumulate some credit for the idea that kindness can make the recipient feel some unease or suspicion. Candidates across the ability range tackled the idea that some recipients of kindness may feel pressured to reciprocate the kindness by doing 'something in return'. Some candidates were able to explore the idea that some kindness is done for 'showing off' or 'credit' in the sense that the person being kind is behaving in that way for status or superiority and this was done well by those operating towards the top end of the mark range.

It is worth emphasising that learners should be encouraged away from copying wholesale. A small number of candidates produced lengthy responses to this task (and other more demanding questions across the paper) but with an over-reliance on copying. Examiners are immediately aware when candidates copy sections of a text and then struggle to award marks when the work is clearly not that of the candidate.

A13. What two things might a charity send to encourage them to donate to its cause?

This question tested the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information and to refer to evidence within texts.

Similar to the task set in June 2017, where candidates were required to 'identify two things that watching kite flying kept Paul Birmingham's children away from' and the swimming task in November 2019 which asked candidates to 'list two natural features', this question required candidates to locate two pieces of information to achieve one mark. The question proved to be a straightforward one and most were successful.

There were only two possible correct answers, and these could be found in the third paragraph of the text. Those who read the section in context would have found no difficulty in selecting the correct details and it was pleasing to note the number who were successful when completing this question. There were one or two who based their answers on their own experiences, rather than the text and these could not be credited. There were also some candidates who chose to reword the answer to the extent that they removed key details. For example, one candidate simply wrote that charities give 'free card'. Another wrote the word 'umbrella', which was taken from the same paragraph but was not cited as something that is sent by a charity. Very few candidates misread the question and only wrote down one example.

A14. Synthesise the information from Texts D and E to show what a person can do to be kind to others.

This question tested the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text.

As per last year's Report, synthesis was, on the whole, completed with both focus and precision. Teachers are often concerned about the approach taken by candidates to synthesis, but the examining team expressed no concerns about this question or the approaches taken. The main concern regarding synthesis is one that appears across both papers and that is an over-reliance on copying. A small minority chose to copy down several paragraphs from each text which is unacceptable. Bullet point responses should also be avoided as this approach does not demonstrate the ability to collate effectively as required for top Band marks. The nature of synthesis is to draw from different sources to make a new text. Those who only take information from one source will find that they are only able to access the criteria for the lower Bands.

Synthesis requires candidates to draw on a range of details gleaned from the texts indicated and to produce a new document. Very few candidates relied on information taken from Text C, but it is worth reminding them that they can only use the texts suggested in the question. Close reading of the question is essential as this provides the steer for the content of the response. For example, for this question, candidates were asked to consider what a person can do 'to be kind to others'. A wealth of details could be found across Texts D and E and very few found themselves struggling for content. A minority tried to compare the two texts and thankfully this approach was relatively rare.

The ability to produce a coherent response, to disentangle information and to remain on task is essential. There are two main approaches that candidates tend to adopt when approaching synthesis – some like to deal with each text separately and others tend to integrate details from both sources. There is no preferred style, and both are treated equally. During this series, the preferred approach was to specify from which text the information was taken. This is not a requirement for the synthesis question but it would appear that many prefer this approach. Perhaps it allows them to organise or compartmentalise their thoughts and ideas.

As with all examination questions, it is worth accessing the OER materials which provide clear exemplars for each task and will aid teachers in their understanding of what constitutes a specific mark in each Band.

Writing

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one argumentation and one persuasion) linked to the topic studied during the reading examination.

For their first writing task, candidates were asked to produce a persuasive talk for BBC Wales:

B1. 'People today never show enough kindness to one another. We must make more effort to be kind.'

Write your talk.

The format of the Writing was a talk and the topic was linked to the Resource Materials. The aim of the Writing was to encourage candidates to write persuasively. Across the cohort, there was no shortage of effort and candidates wrote with enthusiasm and some convincing detail. It was reassuring to note the number of candidates who expressed a genuine interest in the topic and many were at pains to share their own experiences via a series of anecdotes and personal details. Although the cohort was small, we were fortunate enough to see the full range of abilities and were able to award a full range of marks.

When approaching a piece of writing, it is essential that candidates establish the audience and the direction which they wish to pursue. For many the planning stage is essential as it allows them to pause and reflect on the topic and then to amass some ideas. A small minority did not plan and, in most cases, this was evident in their work (which often lacked direction and development). Some candidates would benefit from noting down a few ideas before writing and to give some consideration to the sequence of these. All too often the examining team see plans which list a range of techniques and devices but have no sense of content. Arguably, the latter of these is more important as without content and sequence, writing can often lose impetus and focus.

Some candidates made excellent use of the Resource Materials. Quotes were included in some talks and were used to support an argument or to substantiate a point, which was a sensible approach. Many candidates took the odd word or phrase from the Resource Materials and used these as a springboard to initiate a new topic or point for discussion. Sadly, however, a small minority chose to copy down significant chunks (often word for word) and tried to pass these off as their own writing. This approach is to be avoided at all costs. It is difficult to reward work which is not that of the candidates (and even more difficult when the candidate has introduced their own errors during copying). Please ensure that candidates are aware of the cost of copying work as this approach results in very few marks (if any) being awarded. Examiners know these materials all too well and are immediately aware of what has been copied.

On the whole, the topic seemed to be a straightforward one and most were able to give a range of their own experiences and anecdotes. It was pleasing to read some reflective work where candidates acknowledged a need to be kinder in their own lives to family and friends. Many examples were given in relation to kindness and the multiple different ways that young people find themselves being kind to others. I am not aware of a single candidate who chose to wholly disagree with the topic, but some presented an argument in which they argued that they were sufficiently kind in their day-to-day lives. We read some very heart-warming talks about sick relatives who have been on the receiving end of kindness and also some COVID 19 related talks in which candidates linked their experiences of the pandemic to the topic of kindness.

Few candidates lost sight of the task during the process of writing. A number produced writing that was particularly brief and lacking in detail while others lost track of their ideas and either repeated details or contradicted themselves. There were some blank scripts and hopefully these were the result of absenteeism and not poor time management. Careful timing during the examination will help candidates to apportion their time wisely.

For their second writing task, candidates were asked:

B2. 'You don't have to spend money to find happiness'

Write a lively magazine article for your school or college magazine giving your views about this statement.

Articles feature relatively regularly on English Language examination papers and candidates are well versed in the format of this style of writing and many of the possible techniques that elevate its quality. For this task, candidates were given a proverb which linked loosely to the topic of kindness and they were asked to produce a lively article giving their views. The task required them to produce argumentation writing but the 'lively' aspect of the task gave them some free reign in which to stamp their own style on the piece.

In terms of format, most opted to include a title (in some cases the quotation they had been given) and then to produce several paragraphs based on the topic. Some chose to approach the format a little more creatively and included graphs or illustrations and placed their writing in columns. One or two chose to turn their pages to landscape and wrote across the lines. This can be quite difficult to mark on screen and is an approach that is best avoided. It was pleasing to note that candidates did not waste time producing detailed drawings, but some chose to pointedly link their graphs to the content of the article which created a pleasing coherence.

With regard to content, fewer candidates tended to copy from the Resource Materials, but this remained an issue for some. Some latched onto the direction to produce 'lively' writing and this task proved to be a highlight for many examiners who enjoyed the light-hearted and comical writing, 'True, money doesn't buy happiness but I'd like to try and prove them wrong' was a frequent sentiment. A range of different perspectives was adopted in relation to the direction of the article with some wholeheartedly agreeing that money does not bring happiness and others arguing quite the opposite. It was possible for candidates to look at both sides of the argument and some were quite convincing in their management of this. Those who tried to present a balanced argument performed best if they were able to provide examples and reasons to support their views. Those who frequently flitted between a 'for and against' approach were usually less convincing, especially if the assertions were unsupported.

Technical accuracy, as mentioned in all previous reports, remains a concern across all writing tasks. Some candidates struggled to punctuate from the beginning with strangely placed punctuation in titles and some managed to write entire paragraphs with only one full stop at the end. Comma splicing remains a common feature in written work and randomly placed semi-colons and colons are still evident. Some included a tick list of different types of punctuation on their planning page, which they then tried to force unconvincingly into their writing. It is better for candidates to write naturally than to force punctuation where it does not fit. The usual spelling errors continued with basic homophone errors occurring frequently (our and are, there and their, where and were etc.). It was also disappointing to see candidates who could not spell words given to them during the reading materials or even in the writing tasks.

Overall, it was a pleasure to mark and assess the work produced by the November 2020 cohort and there were many areas to celebrate and commend.

Summary of key points

- Across the cohort, candidates were committed and worked diligently to demonstrate a range of Reading and Writing skills.
- Candidates worked hard on the synthesis question, demonstrating secure understanding of the topic. A range of sensible approaches to collation were offered and those who wrote selectively performed well.
- Some very engaging Writing tasks were presented. However, basic technical accuracy remains a concern, especially incomplete sentences and inaccurate homophone use.



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