

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/01

Paper 1

General comments

This report for 2008 has many similarities with last year's report. Examiners awarded the customary wide range of marks. As was the case last year, certain centres have made substantial progress which is very encouraging. It is noticeable that these centres have paid close attention to the recommendations in previous reports and their candidates have clearly benefited from this approach. On the other hand, there are still many scripts where the candidates' English is seriously flawed. These scripts contain many basic errors of the same sort listed in the common errors section of the previous report. Misinterpretations of the question were relatively rare this year although a minority of candidates did stray from the question into unnecessary digression. Candidates are reminded to note the key words in the question and to pay due attention to them in their responses. In some cases not enough attention is paid to the wording of the question and it is not uncommon to find words wrongly spelled in essays which appear in the title of the question.

Candidates who were rewarded with high marks fulfilled the requirements of the question. They wrote in clear and sometimes ambitious English and made few errors. Their essays were well structured and points were well developed with appropriate examples and illustration. Candidates who held very strong views on certain topics did acknowledge that there were counter-arguments and, in the better essays, showed why they chose to dismiss them. Their rough work, duly crossed out before embarking on their essays, revealed how they developed their essays logically and systematically from diagrammatic essay plans. This is good practice and an infinitely better approach than actually writing several paragraphs, only to cross them out and start the essay anew.

Competent answers were awarded mid-range marks. They were usually not as detailed as the best essays but did contain relevant material with main points being satisfactorily developed. Sometimes the balance in length between introduction, main body of the essay and conclusion was not ideal. The main problem tended to be an overlong introduction before the main points of the essay were tackled. On occasion, conclusions were too brief and failed to refocus the reader's attention on the real substance of the essay. Candidates showed a reasonable working knowledge of English. Examiners had no difficulties following the discussion but some candidates tended to make a sprinkling of careless and avoidable mistakes.

Weaker answers often suffered from digression and were not consistently relevant. A small minority were totally irrelevant. Some were very brief and therefore contained little of real substance. Poor standards of English, as mentioned above, often impeded meaning. In some cases, candidates did not have sufficient ability to express themselves clearly in English although it was quite evident that they had relevant comments to make on the content of the question.

Examiners noted very few rubric infringements this year. However, last year's comments about having margins on both sides of the paper and about the sometimes excessive waste of paper by using answer booklets with more than six pages remain valid. Similarly, for the sake of security, it is not good practice to permit candidates to provide their own paper for use in the examination.

Use of time

The vast majority of candidates seemed to have no problems writing two essays within the given time frame. It was noticeable that more candidates are leaving themselves ample time to check their work for careless and mechanical errors. These candidates saved themselves an appreciable number of marks. However, there are still too many instances of candidates writing at some length and then crossing it all out to start the question all over again or even, to tackle a different question. This is obviously poor practice which leaves little or no time for a comprehensive check near the end of the examination.

Use of English

Examiners had few problems understanding what candidates were stating in their essays. This year it was pleasing to note that the number of essays written in very good English has increased. Such essays revealed a good command of grammar, vocabulary and idiom and contained very few errors. The tone was appropriate to the subject matter. However, as already mentioned, a minority of candidates were handicapped by their very weak English.

Errors which occur regularly year after year include:

- 1 incorrect joining up of words e.g. alot, infact, donot, aswell, eventhough, atleast, afterall
- 2 incorrect separation of words e.g. now a days, some body, no where, more over
- 3 confusion between everyday and every day, to/too, here/hear there/their
- 4 incorrect use of the apostrophe e.g. "its not true," "pollution is spoiling it's beauty,"
- 5 frequent misspelling of opportunity and government
- 6 incorrect comparative forms such as more easier/richer/older
- 7 confusion between affect/effect, amount/number, economic/economical and lose/loose
- 8 frequent and unnecessary overuse of etc.
- 9 repeated problems with the use of definite and indefinite articles
- 10 misuse/omission of commas leading to loss of meaning and disruption of flow

Errors occurring frequently this year include:

frequent misspelling of steroids, cigarettes and habit
confusion between weather/whether, your/youre
misunderstanding of 'chain smoker' often used for heavy smoker
omission of plural form after "one of..." e.g. "one of the most difficult/significant problem/thing
misuse of vanish as a transitive verb e.g. "the government can vanish this problem."

Candidates need to focus consistently on the errors which have occurred regularly over years. They are avoidable if a real effort is made to take due notice of them. Candidates can ill afford to squander marks unnecessarily. However, the work seen from an increasing number of Centres indicates that steps are being taken to avoid these common errors and that the checking of work at the end of the examination is beginning to eliminate careless slips.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

This question was reasonably popular. Weaker answers focused too much on drug taking in general and offered little or, occasionally, no illustration. Better answers welcomed bans for the cheats in various sports. The question of winning at all costs was often justifiably linked to material and financial gain which was considered to be a far cry from the original Olympic ideal. It was felt that not only had the reputation of various sports been severely dented, notably cycling, athletics and baseball, but also that the honour of the home country of these cheats had been sullied. However, the number of spectators at sporting events or following them on TV does not seem to have gone down.

Question 2

This was also a reasonably popular question. Responses were quite varied according to prevailing circumstances in the respective countries. In developing countries there was much talk of corruption where wealthy and influential parents are able to bribe officials to release their wayward children from custody with charges being dropped. This was seen in contrast to the fate of impoverished young offenders who were committed to overcrowded jails for minor offences. Essays from developed countries expressed criticism of lenient punishment even for more serious crimes. It was generally considered, albeit for different reasons, that not enough was being done to help young offenders see the error of their ways and to provide rehabilitation programmes.

Question 3

This question triggered a fair number of responses. Poorer answers were not very clear about the meaning of 'oppressed' which was sometimes confused with 'depressed.' However, most candidates were able to give examples from various countries where violence was able to depose corrupt regimes. By contrast, examples were also given where passive resistance, civil disobedience and negotiation were able to achieve positive results. Most candidates were only prepared to condone violence, whether in the family, in the community, nationally or internationally, when all other options had failed.

Question 4

Quite a popular question. Weaker candidates had plenty of ideas about possible steps governments could take to close the gap between rich and poor but failed to identify the source and amount of the necessary funding or to stress the role of individual effort. Better answers explored the allocations in the national budgets of the respective countries and were able to discuss sensibly where reallocated funds could be used to provide good quality education, skills training and related benefits. The very best responses also pointed out how certain jobs could be made accessible to handicapped applicants and that success in closing the gap could only be achieved by the joint efforts of government and individual citizens.

Question 5

Slightly more popular than **Questions 1** and **2**. Most candidates answered this question within the framework of globalisation. Weaker answers dealt simply with volatile land boundaries (often misspelled as 'boundries' although appearing in the essay title), for example, Mexico/USA and Pakistan/Afghanistan. Some listed the pros and cons of globalisation without linking it closely to the set question. High scoring answers took a much broader view to demonstrate diminishing geographical/ethnic/religious/ language and cultural barriers. The role of the Internet in helping to establish a global village was also discussed as was the predominance of the English language.

Question 6

Not a universally popular question. More able candidates stressed the perpetual human thirst for knowledge, for securing untapped resources and for finding other planets to colonise. They knew the size of NASA's budget and how it compared to other major budget items. This enabled them to make a judgement on the cost within an appropriate context. They were also aware of the spin-offs from space research in the fields of medicine, communications and technology. Weaker candidates tended to be assertive, did not know the cost of space research but assumed that it would go a long way to solving many of our global problems, instead of being 'wasted' on space research.

Question 7

Another less popular question and often not well answered. Specific examples of private sponsorship were rare as were references to malpractice such as the side effects of concealing information about the possible side effects of new drugs. A handful of better answers did illustrate how some companies, without a research department of their own, commission university departments to conduct their research for them. They also pointed out that government funds for research are not infinite and that the processes involved in applying for funds can be lengthy and tedious.

Question 8

This was quite a popular topic. Candidates were generally able to present convincing arguments for and against tourism. However, in many cases the element 'for the sake of our planet' was underplayed or even completely ignored. Some candidates who discussed the impact of environmental degradation of various kinds tended to focus on local and regional effects rather than global. Pollution as a result of emissions from different forms of transport to and from tourist destinations was often overlooked. Better answers did show how some of the pollution caused by tourism could be reduced by more effective controls and better management.

Question 9

This question attracted fewer answers than expected. Better answers did point out that there is already sufficient food available to feed the whole world but that availability is seriously impeded by politics and logistics. The recent trend to use land for bio fuels rather than food was also rightly identified as a considerable worry. These answers were also impressively knowledgeable about the benefits and potential demerits of GM foods. Weaker responses rejected GM food completely, describing it as 'Frankenstein fodder' without supplying any evidence to support this view and, in a few cases, claiming it had been responsible for thousands of deaths worldwide.

Question 10

The most popular topic which was quite well handled overall. Weaker answers realised the dangers of smoking relating to health, addiction and expense but, in supporting a total ban, overlooked the practical difficulties of enforcement and the potential fiscal, economic and social consequences for individuals and the state coffers. More able candidates, whilst supporting the notion of a total ban, pointed to the failure of prohibition some 80 years ago in the United States and therefore questioned the viability of a total ban. They advocated a ban on smoking in public places, as is already in force in an increasing number of countries, to counteract the risks of passive smoking. This measure, linked to higher taxation on tobacco, increased public awareness campaigns and heavy fines for supplying cigarettes to minors was seen as a credible package to restrict smoking.

Question 11

Relatively few candidates chose this question. 'in the twentieth century' was ignored by some candidates who wrote a general appreciation of art forms covering a period much longer than the twentieth century. Several engaging and interesting essays were seen which dealt in some detail with such musical styles as Rock and Roll and Rhythm and Blues.

Question 12

A moderately popular question which was often answered quite well. Credible reasons were given for the appeal or rejection of graffiti by the general public and typical segments of society for and against this art form were identified. More able candidates could name famous exponents of the art and discuss particular aesthetic styles. The abuse of the art form by, for example, exposing the young and innocent to bad or profane language was condemned. The issue of spraying paint over private property was also fully discussed.

Question 13

This was a reasonably popular question. Reference to specific written sources was often limited and even non-existent in some cases. Some candidates dealt exclusively with the value of historic study. Others showed considerable competence in assessing the value of gaining insight into different cultures. The best responses demonstrated the universal aspects of the human experience in literary works.

Question 14

This question attracted quite a number of responses. The general opinion seemed to be that good books are rarely turned into good films. Credible reasons were offered about the failure of the Harry Potter films to live up to the standard of the books. In contrast however, the filming of *The Lord of the Rings* was acclaimed as being on a par with the books. Good general points were recorded about the difficulties involved in adapting films to meet the expectations of avid book readers given the differing criteria usually employed in evaluating books compared with films.

Question 15

Not a very popular question, often tackled by candidates with limited personal knowledge and experience of museums and art galleries. The element 'in your society' was overlooked in some instances. Most answers were generalised and focused on the preservation of culture, the widening of education and on providing an attraction for tourists. Very few responses recalled personal visits to museums and or art galleries and little/no information was given regarding specific museums and their contents.