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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

GENERAL PAPER

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 8001/01 General Paper</p>
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General comments

Use of English

Some candidates present scripts in tiny writing, which can pose difficulties for Examiners struggling to interpret the script.

Many scripts contain too much repetition, particularly of phrases taken from the body of the essay and reiterated in the conclusion. The purpose of a conclusion is to summarise.

Spelling and punctuation continue to improve, but candidates would be well advised not to take into the examination with them a list of vocabulary that they are determined to utilise, whether or not such usage is appropriate. The desire to impress Examiners is understandable but what is looked for is relevance, together with apposite expression.

There has also been evidence of a new trend within essay writing that is not to be encouraged, the use of abbreviations. This tends to accompany a more colloquial style of expression, which is not the approach that would be expected in an academic essay.

Areas where Centres can aid their candidates in grammatical technique include: the use of the plural where the singular would be more appropriate; the misplacement of the apostrophe; the use of the hyphen; the erroneous use of mixed tenses within a sentence; and finally the tendency to write tautologically.

General content

Last year's report identified concern that candidates appeared to be selecting questions from predominantly the first half of the Paper, indicating that perhaps selections were being made in haste, as soon as a familiar topic was spotted. Any such decision taken on impulse was to be discouraged and it was heartening to see in this session that questions were attempted from all areas of the Paper.

There are two things that are lacking from many essays – namely, balance and exemplification. These are still the major areas that need to be addressed.

The wording of a question always contains direction for candidates. It is crucial that they take time to examine closely what the question is asking for, identifying the key or command words. More detail about this follows in the detailed assessment of questions. When the thrust of the question is located, the candidate needs to keep in mind the need to present a balanced argument or assessment. This balance is invariably aided by the use of plenty of relevant examples.

Most candidates are now aware of the need to define terms or the focus of the essay and this has resulted in much improved opening sections.

There are still those candidates who see a topic and write everything they know about it, offering a type of blanket cover, whereas what is needed is attention to the wording within the question.

Candidates should always ensure that they have enough time to reread what they have written and correct minor errors of style and expression.

As a final point in this section it is always a pleasure to read such a variety of answers that have ample evidence of determination to convey knowledge and opinion and generally reflect an awareness of the world in which we live. Examiners are impressed by breadth of viewpoint and the desire to expand experience through tackling subjects from a cross-curricular basis, which is one of the major strengths of this Paper and the candidature.

In conclusion, Centres may like to know that Examiners enjoyed reading the responses of candidates on the whole and remain impressed by the breadth of knowledge and interest displayed. The combination of awareness and a desire to express this in lucid terms are the hallmarks of General Paper.

Comments on specific questions

Paper 1

Question 1

How far do you agree that people from history considered “great” rarely deserve the title?

Despite the comment earlier that candidates are getting better at defining terms, this question did attract a number of responses where a definition was not proffered. These essays were not able to rise above the bottom end of an average mark for content.

There was an over-heavy concentration on Hitler, seen as the universal heavyweight and evil figure from the last century – yet without a supporting definition of greatness, this could not be verified. Greatness can be evaluated in a variety of ways, both positive and negative, but candidates needed to link their assessment to one or the other.

Many took war-time leaders as the focus of this question; in fact peace figures, such as Mother Theresa or Princess Diana, would have had relevance here. Even more interesting would have been any consideration of personalities who have crossed a divide, such as Nelson Mandela – from the role of freedom fighter/terrorist to premier and man of world peace. The difficulty with war leaders in the “Hitler camp” was that many candidates were prompted to offer emotive responses, without objective supportive exemplification and, as a consequence, balance was abandoned.

Question 2

“Not too much, nor too little.” To what extent is this a basis for a fulfilled life?

This was an abstract question that did not attract many responses; those who did attempt it saw the need to define the term but many took the opportunity to write at length from an anecdotal point of view. Their selected criteria were from food, drink, work, money and sex.

What the question needed was a balanced evaluation of the dangers of over-indulgence and under-provision. Few presented both. Many concentrated on over-indulgence, especially in terms of eating and obesity.

There was a tendency to preach about the amorality of excess. Simple examples would have given this approach more weight, for example the transmission of sexual diseases in a promiscuous society.

Question 3

Assess the most important areas for government spending

This was a very popular question and was largely answered in an informed and systematic way.

The key command word in the question was “*most*” and this directed candidates to make an order of priority in their response.

Health and education were universally addressed as the most important issues, closely followed by work-force provision and defence. It was interesting to see the various and differing national perspectives coming out in essays. Many were able to offer viewpoints that were at variance with national policy and substantiate them from a theoretical/academic basis. These candidates achieved high marks for content due to perceptive and mature discussion.

It was rare to find any comparative analysis between developed and developing nations.

Question 4

“Education divides, rather than unites society.” Discuss.

There was almost universal agreement with the statement.

This question required candidates to discuss the importance of education, not merely to consider private versus state schooling, or good universities versus bad ones.

Some took the focus as a class issue, those who can afford the luxury of education and those who need that education in order to be able to have that debate.

The values of education – to inform and promote a breadth of tolerance and understanding – were frequently overlooked for the worthy but more prosaic attributes of respect and discipline.

There was a pleasing incidence of east/west comparisons.

Question 5

Can scientists ever justify being involved in weapon research?

There was a categorical and sweeping assertion that weapon research is wrong, because war is wrong and aggression is wrong, but that it is inevitable. The most commonly cited examples of this were Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Second World War, which were portrayed as the epitome of evil. Many held the scientists responsible for the work that resulted in these bombs as abominations to humanity. There were too many emotive and impassioned tirades, which have no real value in an academic essay, without the opposite viewpoint being considered.

It was notable that almost no candidates mentioned any beneficial spin-offs from weapons research, for example radar, telecommunications, medical advances etc. Had even one of these been considered, some balance would have been found.

Some candidates seem to believe that scientists are motivated by a spirit of malevolence. No one mentioned the concept of research in the name of scientific exploration and experimentation.

Question 6

Is there any point in predicting the weather when we can have no control over it?

Many candidates merely described the changes in the weather patterns due to global warming. This appeared to be a prepared topic.

The overall impression was that candidates viewed this as an easy option, and the response was disappointingly mundane. Planning what to wear on a trip, or the need for an umbrella were interwoven with shipping forecasts and harvest planning.

Few saw the benefits of warnings to evacuate, to make provision within building regulations or to protect infrastructure, for social or economic reasons.

Question 7

“There are more advantages to living in the countryside than in the town.” Discuss.

This was a very popular question.

There were some bucolic descriptions that became carried away by their own rhetoric, the birds singing and the grass swaying in the unpolluted breeze often repeated to little real purpose.

The real problem that arose here was that a list of advantages of one area was simply reversed into disadvantages in the other, whether or not there were genuine differences: there was often no attempt at evaluation or comparative analysis.

Question 8

“Children should be the product of nature, not of science.” Do you agree?

It was apparent here that candidates looked at the wording of the question and made their responses on the basis of their initial reaction, without stopping to look further. Most saw it as an opportunity to discuss cloning, few realised that the remit was much broader, that is, infertility treatment, the dilemma of the infertile etc. as opposed to the natural procreative function which, it is assumed, everyone can achieve.

Hardly anyone examined the issues of fostering or adoption, which, even if not common in the home society, are a regular feature of media from the west.

Those candidates who did consider the ethical dimensions tended to achieve higher awards for content. Those who offered a religious perspective were able largely to substantiate their beliefs, at least in terms of supporting them from religious teaching.

Again balance was essential here, as directed by the wording of the question.

Question 9

Do languages spoken by relatively few people have a place in the modern world?

There were few answers seen to this question.

Those who did attempt it tried to rewrite the question to suit a discussion of the merits of English as a universal language.

Examiners had hoped to find a consideration of the cultural integrity of language; it is, after all, the hallmark of a society, giving regional and societal identity.

Question 10

“Only the rich can afford works of art.” How far is this true?

Hardly any candidates chose this question. Those who did were able to offer their opinions on the materialism of the rich who will gather works of art for the sake of investment. Yet there was a complete lack of exemplification to support the argument – no examples of major works of art, or artists, that are collectable, and no rich patrons named.

Question 11

“Fiction has nothing to do with real life.” Discuss.

Almost above all others this question demanded some examples. Very few were forthcoming, which considerably weakened the essays that were submitted.

All the candidates saw the link between real life and the vehicle of fiction to convey a message or an experience, many saw the utilisation of fiction as an interpretation of modern day values.

Without the support of examples, these answers were weak and insubstantial.

Question 12

Assess the qualities to be found in a good advertisement.

Many candidates became too concerned with the methodology of advertising rather than the features or qualities.

Equally this question needed examples to support the points made, and apart from the ubiquitous McDonald's, none were forthcoming. There was no requirement to focus exclusively on examples from global advertising, it would have been interesting to read about local advertising. Yet the vast majority offered neither, which seriously weakened the essays.

This was a straightforward question and one that could have been attempted by academic high fliers and those who preferred a more observational approach too. We are all members of a consumer society, to varying degrees, so this should have been an issue on which everyone has an opinion.

Paper 8001/02

Paper 2

General comments

Question 1 attracted appreciably more takers than either **Question 2** or **Question 3**, although the appeal of each option varied from Centre to Centre. It is hard to understand why, year in, year out, quite a formidable comprehension exercise should be favoured by the whole range of candidates in preference to other possibly more congenial and less linguistically demanding assignments. What, then, accounts for the enduring popularity of **Question 1**? One tentative explanation is that some anxious candidates are so desperate to come to grips with the Paper that they become mesmerised by what meets their eye first and never explore further. It is even more likely that others may feel far more comfortable with an exercise for which one can, to some extent, be prepared, than with anything that is more difficult to anticipate. On this occasion, certainly, both **Question 2** and **Question 3** did contain elements that had never before appeared in this Paper although candidates have often been asked to consider the merits or otherwise of competing applicants or schemes. Again, the allocation of marks may be such in **Question 1** that candidates who have fared badly in one section may retrieve the situation in another, whereas a poor performance in either **Question 2 (a)** or **Question 2 (b)** could seriously jeopardise their overall mark for content. Finally, some candidates might well have shied away from certain exercises in this particular **Question 3** because they were not absolutely sure what was required. Speculation apart, a considered choice of question after a thorough perusal of the whole Paper is as essential a feature of examination technique as is the effective management of time.

Whereas there was no evidence that any candidates had insufficient time in which to finish the Paper, what they did with the time at their disposal sorted the sheep from the goats. It was almost invariably the case that candidates who had the self-discipline to make methodical notes or rough drafts before writing out their final answers achieved relatively high marks. Others tackled questions 'cold', got into obvious difficulties and had to cross out part or all of what they had written and start again. While their second thoughts were usually productive, their written expression tended to deteriorate as did the presentation of their work. Much more alarming, however, was that even more candidates than usual appeared to suffer from the misconception that the more they wrote the higher their mark would be, mini-essays often materialising despite the instruction to be brief or indications of a word-limit in the rubric. Hence, in yet another Principal Examiner's Report it has to be stated that an answer receives no more credit once it becomes obvious that the candidate has blatantly disregarded considerations of length. Even where there are no explicit instructions on this matter, candidates should make some attempt to equate the expected length of answer with the mark on offer. Finally, candidates are not only wasting time by producing diffuse responses but they are running the risk of forfeiting marks, in that legitimate points may well be introduced too late to register with the Examiner who has quite rightly moved on to the next answer.

Irrelevance, too, was a major cause for concern this year. All too often, it was impossible to award any kind of mark when a question had been completely misunderstood. In this regard, weaker candidates frequently failed to establish exactly what they should have been doing when tackling **Question 2 (a) and (c)**, **Question 3 (c)(i) and (ii)**. Elsewhere, largely peripheral answers achieved little as when, in **Question 1 (a)(i) and (iv)**, candidates overlooked the key phrase 'general point' in the wording and contented themselves with unselective detail. Lastly, extensive 'lifting' rather than the use of a candidate's own words frequently marred what in other respects was a creditable response to **Question 1 (b)**. Here, again, a little more forethought would have paid handsome dividends.

All the evidence above, then, goes to show that the best candidates spend much more time reading and thinking and much less time writing than their less successful peers. However, it was very rare for more than one question to be attempted. In this respect, at least, previous warnings do seem to have been taken to heart.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Although the passage set for comprehension featured a scientific topic, it was written for the lay person rather than for anyone with a specialist knowledge of genetic engineering. Hence, its content should not have been inaccessible to any candidate. It did, however, presuppose an ability to draw inferences from a series of specific examples and it was this that most candidates electing to answer **Question 1** lacked.

- (a)(i) As indicated above, candidates offered far too much detail, often in the form of loose paraphrase, and failed to identify clearly the two general ways in which modern life would have been impossible without traditional genetic modification. Despite some confusion between the selective breeding of bygone times and modern genetic engineering, the possibility of starvation usually featured, if only obliquely. Comparatively few candidates, however, understood the significance of the second point while, in almost every response, the negative slant to the question was ignored.
 - (ii) This proved to be the most difficult question in the whole Paper perhaps because a large number of candidates mistook 'respects' for 'examples'. Be that as it may, many 'brief' explanations extended beyond 250 words, most candidates hazily focusing on product rather than on process. Candidates who were wide of the mark based their answer on the second paragraph and concentrated on previous achievements rather than on modern developments. Others wrote much the same answer as they were to produce for (iii), without further elaboration of the scale of the process involved. Only a few astute candidates identified the immediacy of modern genetic engineering.
 - (iii) By way of contrast, reasonably sound answers were the norm, with most candidates offering acceptable definitions of the processes of isolation, implantation and modification, and with the best showing a great deal of understanding of what was entailed.
 - (iv) As in (i) and (ii), many candidates could not see the wood for the trees but stumbled across the idea of better food amongst the technical data.
- (b) Although the weaker candidates wasted words at the beginning by outlining the case for genetic engineering, the majority of candidates, on this occasion at least, observed the specified word limit. Extensive 'lifting' was often resorted to but virtually every candidate was able to identify and describe some of the more obvious disadvantages. Points, though, were frequently laboured or made piecemeal. A few misguided candidates totally ignored the passage and explained their own objections.
- (c) The general impression was that candidates all too often threw away marks by not complying with the various rubrics although only a handful had a shot at all eight definitions and all eight sentences.
- (i) The most common infringements of rubric were to attempt more than one definition for each word and to disregard the context of the passage. In the first instance, no mark would have been secured had 'complacent' been defined as 'lenient' before it was defined as 'self-satisfied'. In the second instance, no mark would have been secured had 'tolerance' been defined as 'acceptance', which it often means, rather than as 'resistance', which it means in this particular extract. Unsuccessful definitions ranged from near misses such as 'intelligence' for 'ingenuity' and 'consistency' for 'composition' to wild guesses such as 'important' for 'ethical' and 'taste' for 'texture'.

- (ii) As always, it was an extremely rewarding experience to gain such an insight into the attitudes and lifestyles of candidates with such varied backgrounds from their writing of illustrative sentences, some spontaneous, others obviously rehearsed. Bland answers, though, which did not unambiguously establish meaning received no credit, an example being 'Mohit was complacent about his examination result' where 'complacent' could equally aptly have been replaced by 'angry', 'happy', 'anxious', 'fretting' and a thousand other substitutes. By the same token, answers which featured an altered form of a given word, such as 'exploited', 'exploiting', 'tolerate' or 'ethically', or used the given word as a different part of speech, as in 'Her greatest exploit was to recite the 2000-line poem', failed to score a mark. Again, if a word was used with a different meaning from that applied in the passage, for instance, 'capacity' meaning 'volume' rather than 'ability', no mark was forthcoming. Finally, candidates from a few Centres still chose to write more than one sentence in each instance while others plagiarised the passage itself to no avail.

Question 2

Although having to choose to appoint one of three inappropriate applicants might well be nerveracking in reality, there was ample material to compose a convincing justification for any decision. The most perceptive candidates, realising that they were expected to make the best of a bad job, backed the elderly Basil for the post on the grounds that he would be the easiest to replace in due course. They were also not taken in by Elvira's glowing but irrelevant references, saw what the visiting speaker to her women's event was driving at and appreciated that bombarding the National Gallery with e-mails might indicate an impossibly fussy colleague rather than one who was simply eager to secure the position. The less sophisticated candidates, however, took all the material with which they were provided at face value.

- (a) A disturbing number of candidates did not read the question properly and wrote about their favourite applicant rather than about the applicant they would be least likely to select. Such carelessness cost them dear in (b) as well in that it concerned itself with what they had already written about and, therefore, were unlikely to introduce a second time. Be that as it may, while there were many shrewd and mature answers which marshalled the given information extremely effectively, there were even more which simply copied out the appropriate facts in the order in which they had originally been listed. Others latched on to one obvious disadvantage, such as Elvira's lack of formal qualifications in Art, and never went on to consider anything else, everything written being variations on the one theme. Whereas most candidates who rejected Thomas appreciated his shortcomings, those who criticised Basil tended to treat him as a dissolute reprobate or a geriatric and showed no understanding of his previous background, his having been a famous art critic, in particular, being seen as black mark against him.
- (b) With the exceptions mentioned above, few candidates completely missed the point of the exercise though a significant number omitted all reference to their second string while others perversely reintroduced the applicant they had already rejected in (a). The most successful responses compared and contrasted the applicants from a succession of interrelated but different perspectives rather than considering each applicant in isolation from the other. A few assumed criteria that had certainly not occurred to the Examiners, such as only a woman would be suitable as an Assistant Curator, while ageism cropped up when many candidates dismissed the 'incredibly young' Thomas (35) and the 'impossibly old' Basil (62).
- (c) Unlike the previous two questions, one of this order had never been set before. In the event, candidates tended not to take into account what they knew of their successful applicant though whoever they had chosen would have had some easily identifiable chinks in his or her armour. On occasion, then, they fell back on such general questions as 'Are you sure you will be able to do the job?' or 'Why do you want this job?' without hinting at the identity of the interviewee. Even more inept, though, was a question such as 'What is the Mona Lisa?' which would hardly stump Basil or even Thomas. It would have been exceedingly difficult indeed to produce any kind of convincing justification for such questions and none materialised. Elsewhere, a shrewd enough question seemed less impressive when the candidate simply concluded, without any further elaboration, that he or she had asked it because 'it will show whether they really want the job.'

Question 3

As was the case with **Question 1** and **Question 2**, careful reading of and reflection on **Question 3** would have significantly enhanced the quality of the work based on it. The whole exercise involved balancing priorities, each worthwhile in itself but needing to be placed within a wider context. The most successful candidates, therefore, took pains to come to terms with the general situation, the possibility of creating a vast source of water at the expense of much else, before attempting to assess some of the twelve individual points. They also made sure that they interpreted the rubrics with all the commonsense at their disposal. At the other end of the spectrum, the weakest candidates never achieved a sense of perspective while they selected more than one point for comment on every possible occasion, regardless of what the rubric might indicate.

- (a) As anticipated, most of those who produced a relevant answer picked one of the following as the least important point to be taken into consideration when discussing the Aat Dam Project: Garbak's verse, Hajek Isaat's origins and the rare butterflies' habitat. Simple assertion rather than reasoned argument characterised the less successful attempts to justify this choice but the most effective responses showed a keen awareness of the contrast between such factors and the major priorities. When other issues were chosen, it was usually apparent that their significance had not been appreciated by the candidates. So, for instance, there was sometimes no connection between unemployment in Chumjuk and employment on the Aat Darn Project.
- (b) Candidates were at liberty to regard any one of the remaining points as the most important and most, in fact, accorded the prevention of drought and disease the top priority. The most competent candidates, then, worked out the advantageous consequences on the economy of their elimination. Misconceptions, however, abounded. It was quite common for candidates to fail to realise that the Aat Dam Project would drown the valley so that agriculture would be impossible while the famous ancient buildings would disappear unless physically moved to another site. Again, some candidates wrongly jumped to the conclusion that Bechwar already imported water from neighbouring countries.
- (c) Apart from failing to comment on one and the same point in both **Question 3 (e)(i)** and **Question 3 (c)(ii)**, the less successful candidates tended to lack sophistication and to invite rebuttal in their answers.
 - (i) A fair number of candidates argued, plausibly enough, that if anyone was to suffer as a result of the Aat Dam Project, it should be 'them' rather than 'us'. In many answers, though, support for the Aat Dam Project was equated with support for the government, which, in fact, had yet to make up its mind, while human rights rarely came into the picture. When they did, the argument tended to lack conviction as when candidates ignored the whole tenor of the given material by claiming that it was in the best interests of the Fawis for them to be uprooted and forced out of their isolation. When dealing with Hajek Isaat, the leader of the main opposition party, it did not occur to many candidates that he might not have any affection for or even be living in his birthplace any longer or that he might happen to be in favour of the Aat Dam Project, regardless of politics.
 - (ii) Despite some confusion over relations with Everek, most candidates appreciated that flooding the Dunno valley would aggravate political or racial tensions. Where they gained or lost marks was in the cogency or otherwise of their argument.
- (d) Just as happened in **Question 1 (b)**, candidates who floundered elsewhere were on firmer ground once they reached a straightforward and predictable question requiring them to present the case for or against a particular development although a few unfortunates wrote on both sides. When their performance was disappointing, it was because they had failed to enlarge on the original material, which they merely put into their own words, or to give it a dynamic structure.