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GCSE 1500

ENGLISH

REPORT ON COMPONENTS
TAKEN IN JUNE 2000



INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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ENGLISH

General Certificate of Secondary Education 1500

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1500/1 – Non-Fiction and Media Texts: Foundation Tier

Introduction

We are pleased to report on the Summer 2000 GCSE English examination.

It is our impression that the papers were successful in both interesting the candidates and in differentiating performance. The media/non-fiction topics, 'Teenagers at work' and 'The invasion of personal privacy' were challenging and seemed to strike a chord with many candidates. The literary texts which formed the basis of Papers 2 and 4 explored different cultures in a way which was enjoyed by candidates. Evidence of this was shown both in performance and during moderation visits to schools for the Speaking and Listening component where the texts quite often formed the basis of both presentations and discussion.

Centres generally deal with the coursework components of the examination in a very efficient manner in terms of task setting, assessment and administration and, as always, we would thank English teachers for this.

Success of the examination can also be measured by the pattern of results and these demonstrate a clear maintenance of standards broadly in line with Centre predictions.

What follows is a detailed analysis of each component.

General Comments

The subject matter of both passages in this paper clearly struck a chord with candidates at all levels; even those who had become disenchanted with their school experience found a topic in which they were interested and about which they could write at some length. This involvement in the subject matter proved to be particularly advantageous to the candidates when responding to the writing tasks in Section B; however, Examiners commented that, at times, it was less helpful when answering the Section A reading tasks as the less wary tended to seize the opportunity to comment on the value or otherwise of part-time, paid work without taking notice of the specifics of the tasks they were meant to be addressing.

Overall, Examiners reported favourably on the 'performance of the vast majority of candidates, who wrote at at least adequate length on all questions. There was very little evidence that candidates had problems in coping with the time constraints of the paper; on the contrary, most appeared to respond well to the need to focus their thoughts on to completing the paper in the time available. Although candidates' written expression continues to be marred by careless errors of spelling and punctuation (particularly in the use of full stops to separate sentences) and a failure to organise their ideas in structured paragraphs, Examiners noted that there is marked improvement in the way in which the reading tasks in Section A are answered. Increasing numbers of candidates are successfully answering the summary task within the suggested word limit, and the responses to Task 2 reveal an encouraging awareness of the need for analysis rather than narrative. Centres

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

should be aware that the hard work they have put in to teaching examination techniques appears to be paying off.

Comments on Individual Questions

Section A

Task 1

Read again 'Overworked and underpaid-and only 15!' and then summarise:

- *why children like Stacey take on jobs outside school*
- *the problems they face in doing so*

Use your own words as far as possible.

Write about 200 words in total.

The passage about Stacey Clarke on which the summary task was based presented candidates with a real challenge, as the material required considerable reorganising to show a good understanding of both elements of the question. The various relevant bits of information were scattered throughout, with attitudes and approaches changing as each 'speaker' said her/his piece. The vocabulary, whilst accessible, was quite challenging and there were plenty of opportunities for inference.

The best candidates organised and selected their material well, with clear reference to both elements; there was much evidence of time having been spent profitably in planning. These responses revealed a clear, overall understanding of the material and the ability to look beyond Stacey Clarke, to show a sound grasp of the wider issues involved and to express this in their own words within the required word limit.

Middle range candidates tended to follow the material chronologically but to show a clear understanding of it. Although they did not always use their own words, they generally succeeded in selecting the right material. However, many candidates at this level reduced the effectiveness of their responses by including unnecessary quotations; in this task the focus is on summary not analysis; similarly, a quotation given on its own is not a convincing demonstration of the candidates' understanding.

As hinted at earlier, weaker candidates often gave their own opinions unrelated to the text, and introduced inappropriate points from the pre-released material. Their answers tended to be unfocused, disorganised and with a marked imbalance between the two elements of the question.

Task 2

Read again 'Helen wants a job' and then explain:

- *the differences between the shopkeeper and Helen's mother.*
- *how the writer uses language to make the differences clear.*

Remember to put quotation marks round any words or phrases taken out of the passage.

The Helen Forester passage appeared easy on the surface but presented candidates with a range of possibilities as far as interpretation was concerned. It was accessible to all, however, and even the weakest responses revealed an understanding of the differences between the two women. There were some areas of misinterpretation due either to historical perspective (the shopkeeper was subject to much, moral indignation for selling cigarettes to an under-aged child), or to over-zealous attempts to use the pre-released material (the hours Helen was expected to work were seen as evidence of exploitation). However, these misunderstandings did not lead to candidates being penalised. More interesting, perhaps, was the fact that the majority of candidates were much more sympathetic to the mother's attempts to protect Helen (as they saw it) and more critical of the shopkeeper's attitude than had been anticipated. Although such responses may not have picked up on some of the inferences in the tone of the passage, they were invariably accepted as valid.

The best responses included good and well-supported analysis of the differences between the two women and a clear appreciation of how the shopkeeper changed her attitude as the conversation developed. There was also a positive attempt by these candidates to analyse the writing of language.

Middle-range responses took a much more clear-cut approach, seeing one or other of the women as 'good' and the other as 'bad' without showing an awareness of the nuances of their conversations; however, there was generally a sound use of quotation and reference to support their views.

The weakest responses entirely misunderstood the relationship between Helen, her mother and the shopkeeper; failed to support their comments and tended to make unsupported assertions about the shopkeeper's social and geographical background. (The use of the word 'luv' led to her being seen as North Country, Cockney or Welsh!) A further linguistic misunderstanding led to some candidates describing the shopkeeper as 'tarty' based on the fact that she spoke 'tartly'(sic) to Helen's mother.

Section B

Overall the quality of writing was of a fair standard. There were only a few candidates whose writing failed to communicate and a great many who could express themselves accurately and clearly. As mentioned in the introduction to this section of the report, the main weaknesses were in sentence separation and in a failure to structure the essay by using paragraphs. This tended to result in unplanned and unforeseen responses, not always relevant to the topic.

Task 3

'If we want better educated children they should not be allowed to have part-time jobs.'

What do you think?

Task 3, although quite popular, was not always well done. Only the best candidates went beyond the contents of the pre-released material and that printed in the question paper itself. The best responses, however, selected their arguments carefully and produced a well-structured argument; the weakest rambled at great length and included often irrelevant personal anecdote. Inevitably there were those who unconsciously undermined their arguments by making statements such as 'I've had a part time job for 2 years and its not interfeared with my edcaution'!

Task 4

You want to take a part-time job, but the Head of your school or college has refused to give permission.

Write a letter to persuade the Head to allow you to take the job.

The best candidates appreciated that the key-word in Task 4 was 'persuade' and wrote with a clear awareness of the audience and a shrewd understanding of how best to convince a Headteacher to change her/his mind. They used convincing, personal details and a measured tone, although perhaps the offer of one candidate to pay the Head 5% of his earnings was going a little too far.

Middle range candidates tended to cite the problems referred to in the Stacey Clarke passage and say that they would not allow these to happen to them, while the weakest either threatened the Head or told her/him that (s)he was well out of order and had no right to interfere.

In conclusion the paper appeared to be well suited to the candidates and tested them fairly across the full range of ability.

1500/2 – Literary Texts: Foundation Tier

General Comments

It was gratifying to see how many candidates had taken note of the advice that had been particularly stressed in last year's report and in the subsequent training offered to Centres. It was noticeable this year that answers to the reading task in Section A were far more focused, and that most candidates were devoting equal time and effort to the two writing tasks in Section B. Candidates responded well to the tasks set, and there was little evidence of timing problems except where answers became too ambitious and lengthy in Section B. Although candidates had clearly been well-prepared on the pre-released material (with very few instances of serious distortion or misunderstanding this year), there were fewer instances of over-preparation as most candidates did focus directly on the task set.

Comments on Individual Questions

Task 1

Describe the difficulties Esther had to face. How does she show her determination to overcome them, and to what extent does she succeed?

Wise candidates used the structure indicated by the question, either by outlining all the difficulties before proceeding to the evidence of her determination and then the evaluation of her success, or by taking one difficulty at a time and tracing it through to the eventual outcome. Although there was a tendency to revert to a more narrative mode in places, this structure usually ensured a return to focus at key stages in the answer.

Most candidates mentioned the three 'giants' as Esther's main problems, the best ones giving details from the text to illustrate the unfriendly nature of Svetlana, the stern if not cruel treatment meted out by the teacher, and the difficulties presented by the Russian language. Here the distinguishing features of higher band answers were the clear understanding of Esther's feelings as she faced the new school, the 'chilly' first lesson and the 'sea of strange letters', and the ability to select examples from the text with some helpful comment rather than narrating each episode. For example, weaker candidates described the day of the contest at length, mentioning that Esther did not know what to wear, had forgotten to put on any shoes, and arrived drenched in perspiration only to be told her name wasn't on the list and she had to have shoes before she would be allowed on the stage. Better candidates used these details to show her determination, wearing unsuitable clothes in a desperate effort to look respectable, making do with ill-fitting slippers because there were no shoes to fit her (something she was too proud to admit to Raisa Nikitovna), and forcing the teacher to allow her to enter through sheer persistence, ignoring the cruelty of her mimicry. Good candidates recognised problems in addition to the 'giants', using the many instances from the text that illustrated Esther's poverty and her valiant attempts to improvise and make things last. Others saw physical hardship in the long lonely walk to school, the bitter cold, and the absence of summer clothing to enable her to cope with the summer heat.

The best answers thus responded with sympathy to Esther's problems, selected examples supported by close reference or quotation from the text to develop their ideas and showed through regular helpful comment the relevance to the task. Determination was normally linked to an action, but good candidates read behind the text to appreciate her qualities of character. For example, 'I stood straight as a needle, my head raised high' emphasises the fierce pride and courage that strengthened her determination. The final element of the task, the evaluation of her success, proved a clear discriminator. Most candidates could see that earning respect from Raisa Nikitovna was an achievement, and that reciting the poem was an indication of Esther's progress with the Russian language. The best answers were more balanced, seeing that the respect earned was still 'grudging', the performance lacked 'colour' and 'spirit', the audience were amused by her difficulties with the over large slippers, and the applause was 'weak'. Some picked up her reference to friends and used this to suggest she had had some success in relating to other pupils in her new school. Sadly, approaching the end of the answer, several candidates lapsed into quoting most of the two paragraphs relating to the outcome of the contest without commenting on the significance. Here, Examiners could at best give credit for points implied but not convincingly expressed. A few candidates attempted to analyse the use of language, which was not a requirement of this task except where it was an aid to understanding Esther's difficulties, determination, or success.

Task 2

Describe one or more 'giants' you have faced in your life and explain how you have overcome them.

This produced an impressively varied response including some very frank and often moving or harrowing accounts of battles with bereavement, serious illness or injury, drugs, pregnancy and eating disorders. Even those who closely followed the passage in outlining the problems involved in joining a new school managed to include their own personal touches. Bullying was one issue that aroused very strong feelings, and it was felt that some of the weakest candidates were sufficiently engaged to find plenty to write about. On balance, the most successful answers tended to develop one or, at most, two problems in depth, exploring fully the issues, the choices available, the writer's feelings, and the resolution. Those who included several lost power and authenticity, often lapsing into a repetitive format and vocabulary.

The big improvement in performance in task two this year arose from the realisation that informative writing does need full development to be effective. Sadly, this was not always reflected in the paragraphing, which often ranged from inadequate to non-existent. Whereas some candidates confidently organise narrative material into paragraphs where changes in time, place or speaker present relatively straightforward guidelines, they seem unable to plan and structure their ideas in more descriptive writing. Similarly, although we would not expect to find the same range of vocabulary and sentence constructions as are found in narrative tasks, the hallmark of the best candidates was an ability to craft sentences for effect and to avoid undue repetition of vocabulary.

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

Candidates should remember that the Section B writing tasks are marked primarily for their linguistic features, including the spelling and grammatical accuracy of first draft writing. Clarity of expression and helpful organisation of ideas are more important than originality of content. In fact, those who introduced melodrama often lost control of the task and failed to convince.

Task 3

Write a story beginning: 'You're not going out looking like that!' said a voice behind me.

This produced lively (often humorous) writing and spirited dialogue. The best answers balanced dialogue with narrative to produce a story with strong characterisation, and clear control and direction leading to a suitable or surprise ending. Less successful attempts rambled, relied almost totally on dialogue, or changed into impassioned invective against parental interference. Although this might a decade or so ago have been viewed as a strictly female scenario, boys wrote with equal conviction, imagination and enjoyment.

Here again, candidates should remember that quality of writing is more important than quantity, and the correct paragraphing and punctuation of dialogue is essential to ensure ease of communication. Those who failed to distinguish between helpful and unselective, mundane detail, or who produced long, rambling sentences, or littered their work with unnecessary slips, omissions, and spelling errors, could not expect to receive the highest grades. Presentation is also important: when it is verging on the illegible, Examiners might inadvertently miss the more positive features.

1500/3 – Non-Fiction and Media Texts: Higher Tier

General Comments

Section A

Examiners were pleased that candidates of all abilities had been stimulated by the theme and reading material of this paper. The two passages of reading material were based on the theme of individual freedom. The article, which had been specially written to complement the extract from Nelson Mandela's autobiography, was an attempt to present both sides of the argument. It enabled us to set a summary task requiring the skills of selection, re-wording and organisation, and also to test inferential understanding of points of fact and opinion. There were also plenty of opportunities for comment on style and language in Task 2.

It was pleasing that reactions to the article varied so widely. Many agreed that John Key was right to be concerned about the present degree of surveillance, whilst others of varying abilities considered him to be 'paranoid', 'paranoyd' or 'pranod'. The Nelson Mandela extract encouraged the taking of a wider perspective. Written under far greater duress, there was a dignity about it which, in the eyes of some perceptive readers, made the first piece seem almost trivial by comparison.

Comments on Individual Questions

Task 1

Read again 'Watching You Watching Me'.

Summarise the ways in which, according to the writer, privacy and personal freedom are increasingly restricted, and what he thinks are the advantages and disadvantages of this.

Write about 250 words in total.

Use your own words as far as possible.

This was a testing summary, requiring thought and planning. It was therefore disappointing that so few candidates made a plan on the answer paper. (Examiners are instructed to read rough notes and to credit points made in them even when they do not find their way into the formal written response.)

The more able covered all three elements of the task: they retrieved a wide range of relevant points, grouped and synthesised them sensibly and expressed them concisely in good 'own words'. Those who tried to re-organise the material did so well, interpreting advantages/disadvantages according to their understanding and experience. Original and individual inferences were rewarded, even if they were not anticipated in the mark scheme. Those of average ability usually went through the passage chronologically, which made their answers too long and sometimes repetitive. Too many wasted time with generalised introductory and closing paragraphs. Fewer responses used 'lifting' and/or quoting this year, but there were still pockets from individual Centres.

It was clear that the vast majority had been well prepared for this task. The greatest problem seemed to be a significant minority of candidates who had decided to ignore their teachers' sensible advice and to go their own way. The question was seen as an opportunity to engage in a challenging dialogue with John Key and to deal with the style points – often with more success than the writer was later to achieve in Task 2. It cannot be reiterated too strongly that, however interesting the reading material, those hoping to perform well in this task must respond to the question set. Personal or analytical comments are not required here.

Task 2

'Watching You Watching Me' and 'Young Lawyers' both describe situations which the writers see as abuses of civil rights.

Explain and comment on the different ways in which each writer tries to make you share his feelings and point of view.

Support your answer by referring to the content, style and language of both passages.

The material provided an excellent basis for analysis. Although explicit comparison was not required in the task, those who responded in this way were not penalised as allowance was made for the fact that they had set themselves a harder task. Despite the linguistic tricks of the key article, there were perhaps fewer obvious language features to comment on this year. This was balanced by the opportunity given to make a more sophisticated analysis of content.

The more able made a gratifyingly wide range of sound critical observations, and generally adopted the sensible three-step practice of point, evidence and analysis. Words such as 'besieged', 'humiliations' and 'bleak' were evaluated perceptively, not just listed as examples of 'powerful language'. Many grasped the irony – and some, even, the symbolism – of Nelson Mandela's office being situated across the road from the statues of justice. Original comments included the following from a pupil who picked up on the word 'brandishing': 'The word is normally associated with a weapon, and Mandela saw the knickers as a weapon he had to use to win his case.'

Middle range candidates generally responded quite well to content, and identified rhetorical questions, emotive language and repetition. The use of critical terminology is improving, but some candidates listed literary terms which they were determined to find whether the device was present or not. There is still a tendency to make a correct assertion, such as 'Key uses colloquial language' and to simply leave it at that.

Weaker candidates were much happier with Key than with Mandela, and much happier writing about content than about language. Comments on layout were made, even though they were not asked for in this particular paper. Sometimes candidates' obvious empathy with Nelson Mandela's plight led to heartfelt personal comment rather than a focused attempt to answer the question.

General Comments

Section B

The theme of the paper had been indicated clearly by the pre-released material, and most writers had plenty of material at their disposal. Both tasks elicited powerful and committed arguments, although Task 4 proved much more popular. The younger generation, it seems, is far more interested in technology than in personal freedom.

Comments on Individual Questions

Task 3

You are a candidate in a school or college election. The big issue is, 'More Freedom for Students – or Less?'

Write the words of a speech you would make to your year group, persuading them to support your point of view.

This task required a sustained sense of audience and a good grasp of rhetoric. In the best responses the agenda was clear and the case was put with power, persuasion and wit. Good logical arguments led to strong conclusions, and in some cases to memorable slogans, such as: 'Forget the others – vote for Crothers!' Surprisingly, many of the best answers argued for **less** freedom. I am not quite sure what to make of this! Those of average ability were often obsessed by school uniform, staying on the premises all day, bans on jewellery and makeup, not being allowed to stay inside at break and lunchtime and having to wait until the end of lessons to go to the toilet. Most attempted rhetoric, although the weakest were let down by poor syntax and spelling. Too many responses hit a repetitive question format and employed a limited tone of belligerence.

Task 4

'Our lives are all the better for technology.' Argue your point of view.

Given the content of the pre-released material and the direct question 'Is computer technology a threat to privacy and personal freedom?', this task did not come as a surprise. Candidates had researched and contemplated the topic, and Examiners were surprised by the depth of knowledge of technological developments and vocabulary which many writers revealed.

A minority of Centres, however, had undertaken study of the pre-released material in a rather 'military' fashion. Their candidates produced very similar pieces of writing, even including the same quotations and Latin tags. The purpose of the pre-released material is to provide a context for a difficult form of writing, and to enable discussion. Those who are taught all to think and write the same thing will be disadvantaged as their writing lacks freshness and originality.

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

The best responses grouped together similar technologies, or concentrated on a select few examples and carefully evaluated them. The material was often complex, the arguments persuasive. At lower levels a narrow and limited view was taken: computers, e-mail, mobile phones and TV. Examiners found it sad to note that life would not be worth living without a mobile, personal CD player and Playstation.

Advice to Centres

- 1 Please use the pre-released material in a way which will encourage candidates to produce individual and original responses.
- 2 Reports this year indicated that paragraphing was weaker than before, and in a minority of Centres seemed not to have been taught. Writing to argue and persuade requires planning, and needs a good concluding paragraph. Paragraphing is therefore **essential**.
- 3 Whilst more Centres are entering candidates for the appropriate tier, candidates estimated at E should not take this paper. The 'allowed' E on this tier represents only the top half of the grade, and the reading material is too difficult for those at this level.

1500/4 – Literary Texts: Higher Tier

General Comments

The overall performance was very impressive. The pre-released passage was thoroughly understood by candidates and had engaged their interest; it had been well but not 'over' taught, in that the best candidates were able to identify subtleties of relationships and influences and appreciate the effectiveness of the author's language, without being led into over-ambitious symbol-searches or too narrow (or even distorted) interpretations of the story's explicit meaning. Although the tasks in Section B required different kinds of writing, they both invited candidates to write directly from their own experience; in doing so, many – especially those with more modest linguistic skills – were able to interest and entertain the reader with the authenticity and vigour of their material. There was no evidence that candidates did not have enough time to do justice to the whole paper, though not all managed their time equally effectively. Most contained their (often very full) responses in Section A sufficiently to give themselves appropriate time for Section B, but there was often considerable disparity in length and quality between Tasks 2 and 3.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) *Explain how life in India changes the relationship between Naraian and Cathy, and show how the writer's use of language helps us to understand those changes. Support your answer by referring to the content and language of the story.*

The task did not ask for an account of the relationship or a history of the couple when they were in England. Too many candidates began with such a narrative and were often well into their answers before they became relevant to the question. Of course it was necessary to describe the relationship in order to show how life in India changed it, but the better candidates were able to combine these two elements of the task in answers which were always clearly focused on it. The more obvious aspects of the relationship which changed were their social life (the various ways in which Cathy felt excluded in the company of Naraian's friends) and their feelings for each other (Naraian's behaviour in public and the bickering at home). Other ways in which they drifted apart were identified less frequently: Cathy's disappointment as her husband's idealism faded; the way in which their shared pride in the flat disappeared, and the very different ways in which they responded to the remorseless pressure of the family to conform to their expectations. These family pressures were the aspect of life in India which most candidates explained well; not all noticed or explicitly described the wider cultural influences which Cathy found difficult; the general attitudes to women as single girls, wives and mothers and the physically oppressive effect of India's large ornate furnishings, the heavy meals, the heavy people, the piles of possessions. Nevertheless, most candidates responded adequately or very well to these first two elements of the task. The third requirement – to show how

language helped the reader to understand the changes – was sometimes ignored, often only addressed implicitly in the selection of (more or less appropriate) questions, and only sometimes explicitly attempted. Some of these appended a paragraph at the end to comment on linguistic techniques such as symbolism (in the mausoleum, for example, or the ‘heartshaped farms’) parallels, alliterations or metaphors and similes. Where these were usefully illustrated they clearly fulfilled this requirement; but the very best candidates registered their awareness of the contributions of language throughout their answers.

- 2) *Describe how and why a person or group of people has made a strong impression on you.*

Many chose historical figures – Mother Theresa, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King and Anne Frank were popular role-models – while others had been influenced by Mum and/or Dad, Gran or Grandad, a schoolfriend or an inspiring teacher. The choice of famous figures could produce well-informed and interesting answers, but there was a danger that they became a mere re-hash of the candidate’s history course and the ‘how and why’ of the question got overlooked. This was not by any means always the case, but candidates who worked from their own experience of someone they had known and admired could interest the reader with an unfamiliar tale and often wrote movingly about a deeply felt and enduring experience; in these answers, the ‘how and why’ were evident in every line of the account. A number of candidates chose characters from the story – often Naraian’s mother. Though some managed to make such a choice quite sensibly, it rarely produced a strongly felt or very convincing answer. Candidates should be reminded that although the Section B topics are related in theme to the Section A passage, their material is expected to be quite independent of it. No marks in Section B are awarded for understanding of, or response to, the reading passage; the criteria are related solely to writing skills (see below).

- 3) *Write a story about an experience which failed to live up to your expectation.*

Good candidates were able to show a clear contrast between their expectations of a chosen experience and the disappointment felt in its realisation. There was not always a satisfactory balance between the two halves of this contrast. The ‘expectations’ were often little more than an account of events leading up to the experience, with little emphasis on the writer’s thoughts and feelings about what was to come; ‘reality’ was often a catalogue of horrors or boredom or accidents which effectively showed how the experience failed, though again a reflective element in the narrative would have pointed the contrast more successfully. High on the disappointments list were the Millennium Dome, Disneyland in Paris, Aston Villa, ‘Oblivion’ at Alton Towers, First Dates and family holidays in unreliable motorcars or over-sold foreign hotels. There were some sensitive and deeply felt personal disappointments and many amusing and lively accounts of fiascos which kept the Examiners entertained. Light relief was also sometimes provided

unintentionally, by candidates who, for example, found a hotel in 'Christine condition' or described the tragedy of a boy who nearly drowned after falling under 'pier pressure'.

Section B

This report has described the features which characterised the content of good and weaker answers to Tasks 2 and 3; but, as the published band descriptors for these writing tasks make clear, the principal criteria of assessment are the linguistic skills shown by the candidates. Better answers will show a range of sentence structures, an appropriate and wide vocabulary of words correctly spelt, punctuation which articulates sentences and dialogue clearly so that their meaning is clear at a first reading, and an ability to structure a piece with an arresting beginning, a series of linked and coherent paragraphs leading to a conclusive ending. Far too many candidates devote their attention (wrongly) to **what** they are writing rather than to **how**. Overlong answers dilute their impact on the reader and lead to linguistic laziness. Centres will improve their grades significantly if they can persuade their candidates to take more care with these linguistic features of their writing.

1500/5 – Written Coursework

It was pleasing that there was a considerable amount of very positive feedback from Moderators. Many aspects of the syllabus now seem to be running smoothly.

The vast majority of Centres were quick to send their MS1s and the requested samples. Many Centres also provided full evidence of how tasks had been set up, drafted and assessed. Summary sheets often identified the unit, the task, the date of completion, the source material and the folder requirements being met. An increasing number of Centres identify deficiencies and show the mathematics applied in any deductions. Internal moderation is frequently more in evidence, with mark alterations for deficiencies and comments justifying mark changes. It is also helpful to Moderators when stimulus materials are provided by Centres to show the basis of the tasks.

The majority of Centres are now using the five piece model for coursework which has been advocated for several years. As has been pointed out on several occasions, the submission of an unnecessarily large amount of coursework can disadvantage candidates. In the first place, written coursework is a 20% component of the examination whereas the examination papers are worth 60%. Too much time spent on coursework may well mean that there is inadequate preparation for the examination papers. In the second place, moderation of coursework has to be carried out holistically; a Moderator cannot make a selection. Frequently the inclusion of too much coursework will bring the mark down rather than enhance it.

Units 1 and 2 continue to cause problems for a minority of Centres. It is important that there is a distinction between the types of writing. Too often, still, any available piece of writing is submitted for these units, and some Centres (or candidates) treat them as completely interchangeable. Better examples of informative writing, for instance, included one based on a TV documentary, from the *Timewatch* series, which offered candidates an opportunity to draw on a body of material, and to recast it as an encyclopaedia entry. The origin of the task in a TV programme watched in class meant that material could not be simply 'lifted' verbatim. Better Unit 2 work was often based on personal experience: for instance, 'My Worst Disaster', which produced interesting and lively personal accounts.

Unit 3 produces fewer problems year on year. The fact that *Of Mice and Men* has been clearly identified in the revised National Curriculum Orders as writing from a different culture must surely mean that Steinbeck has finally been removed from the English Literary Heritage. Amongst Unit 3 tasks which evoked good responses this year were:

- A comparison of fables: Chaucer and Orwell
- Use of background details in 'Jane Eyre'
- Is 'Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde' a horror story?
- Macbeth – victim or villain?
- 'The presentation of education in 'Cider with Rosie'

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

- 'Isabella and the Pot of Basil' by Keats and 'First Ice' by Voznesensky: Compare the treatment of loss in the two poems.

UCLES

1500/6 – Speaking and Listening Coursework

The Speaking and Listening component was moderated in a fairly straightforward manner. The performances on the national moderation videotape were successfully assessed by the vast majority of Centres within the agreed tolerances.

The marks for the candidates assessed and a commentary on the performances are attached to this report.

As usual, approximately two hundred Centres received moderation visits. The work that was seen in schools was often varied and interesting and Moderators, more often than not, found themselves in close agreement with the Centres' assessments.

Once again we would thank Centres for the efficiency with which the administrative paperwork was completed. Nearly all Centres use the record sheet provided by OCR, this having proved itself as a simple and effective vehicle for record keeping. Some Centres undertake a number of assessments while it is clear that others undertake only the three assessments. We acknowledge the difficulty of assessing large classes but would recommend that, over the five terms of the course, at least six assessments are made. This is the component of the course where there can be a wide variation in performance on a day by day basis, depending not only on whether the candidate is interested in the task but also on factors such as the formation of discussion groups, the nature of the audience and so on.

Centres must make sure that the three different types of talk specified in the syllabus are covered together with opportunities for talk in both formal and informal situations.

The full records kept by the majority of Centres show that a good variety of tasks is undertaken and that much of the work is undertaken with enthusiasm.

We remain conscious that the end process takes place at a time which is very inconvenient for Centres; we therefore hope that moderation visits cause as little disruption as possible. We would recommend to Centres that tasks are organised which have a relevance in the revision process. For instance groups might discuss the pre-released material for Papers 2 and 4, or the topics pre-released for Papers 1 and 3. Pairs might validly discuss aspects of a literature text. Individuals might also make presentations on topics from other subjects as an aspect of their revision. Such activities will be seen by candidates to have a relevance to important aspects of necessary work in the run up to examinations.

We would remind Centres that the internal marking and moderation of candidates must be completed before the end of March and before any moderation takes place.

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

As Centres know, Speaking and Listening is the common component in English and the procedures used by all examining bodies are the same. QCA has expressed concern about the upward drift in marks awarded for Speaking and Listening and that, in some Centres, there is an increasing divergence between overall grades and grades for Speaking and Listening. The small overall improvement in grades awarded by OCR this year is, we believe, perfectly acceptable but this is a matter which will be discussed during advisory visits 2000/2001.

We would thank all English teachers for the efficiency with which this component is taught and assessed.

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Summative Comments

Emma

Emma contributes well in all tasks but without fully developing her ideas.

In the discussion of legal ages she works well with her partner, showing some understanding and making appropriate personal, if anecdotal, observations with some clarity, though points are not explored fully. In her role as a teenager in the Nightclub Task her presentation is rather brief, but well focused and ordered, and expressed in generally appropriate language. She is initially a little diffident in the group discussion but becomes more effectively involved as it develops; she follows the argument and conveys her own point of view clearly.

Whilst there are occasional C elements in her achievement, such as close listening and some fluency in speaking, it is more strongly D in terms of the relevance of her contribution and her ability to vary the style of delivery and to listen and respond with some understanding.

Mark: 58

Katharine

Katharine is an able and confident speaker who takes on challenging roles and subject matter.

In the Samaritan task she collaborates well with her partner, articulating her ideas using complex vocabulary; she grasps and expresses the essential points, particularly about the need to be non-judgmental and the difference between empathy and sympathy. Her talk on 'Women's Role in Modern Society' is cogent and skilfully developed, well tailored to its audience and delivered without notes. As co-ordinator of the Trafalgar Square group discussion, she fulfils her role well, sustaining the discussion and getting everyone involved by precise and sensitive questioning and comment. She sums up well at the end and provides a platform for further thought.

Her achievement is assured and accomplished enough to suggest a clear A but it does not show the exceptional ability necessary to achieve an A*.

Mark: 87

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

Lewis

Lewis approaches every task with commitment but lacks the command of vocabulary to convey his ideas entirely clearly.

His contributions keep the headline discussion going; he is able to make comparisons, raise questions and follow through ideas. He tries to explain points but lacks the vocabulary to express them clearly and there is little evidence of interpretative skill. He approaches his role as vicar with some gusto and appropriate sense of audience; his presentation is structured and developed but he is more dependent on notes than the other candidates and he does not share the same sense of purpose. He does not seem to understand fully all the ideas raised in the Trafalgar Square discussion, but he listens carefully and makes some useful points.

Overall he shows confidence and sensitivity within the limitations of his understanding and command of expression; his level of achievement is towards the top of the E grade.

Mark: 49

Martin

Martin is a hesitant speaker with an insecure command of standard English expression, but he contributes positively to every task.

His comments in the headline discussion are stilted and lack depth of understanding, but he is able to compare the key features and to follow the central ideas, expressing a preference. As the fast-food restaurant manager in the Nightclub task, his presentation is structured, if undeveloped, and delivered in straightforward occasionally faltering language. In the Trafalgar Square discussion he expresses his opinion quite emphatically but he is not able to express it fully or develop it. His contribution to the discussion is very limited.

Martin listens carefully and communicates reasonably clearly though he lacks fluency and his command of expression is insecure. He adapts his talk to each context with limited confidence and little development. The F grade provides the best fit.

Mark: 36

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

Tom

Tom exhibits a range of achievement in different contexts.

In the discussion on the influence of TV on children he interacts well with his partner; he contributes ideas and expands important factors, using a flexible range of vocabulary, to develop the discussion. His presentation in the Nightclub task is more pedestrian but it is delivered in a consistent and apt style. In the final task, whilst he does not sustain the discussion, it is clear from his comments that he has understood the opinions of others and is able to express his own viewpoint with clarity and decisiveness.

His level of attainment in the pair task is nearer to B than C, but in the other tasks his level of achievement is more limited. In general he is a fluent and competent speaker who listens closely and responds with confident understanding. Overall the C grade descriptors provide the best fit.

Mark: 68

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

The number of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Percentage in Grade	5.06	14.76	21.74	24.76	17.52	9.14	4.23	1.60
Cumulative Percentage in Grade	5.06	19.82	41.56	66.31	83.83	92.96	97.20	98.80

These statistics are correct at the time of going to publication.

The total entry for the examination was 64 194.

Component Threshold Marks

Component	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Paper 1 Non-Fiction and Media Texts (Foundation)	–	–	–	40	32	25	18	11
Paper 2 Literary Texts (Foundation)	–	–	–	43	35	27	19	11
Paper 3 Non-Fiction and Media Texts (Higher)	–	40	32	25	16	–	–	–
Paper 4 Literary Texts (Higher)	–	43	35	28	18	–	–	–
Paper 5 Reading and Writing	–	81	71	61	51	41	31	21
Paper 6 Speaking and Listening	91	81	71	61	51	41	31	21

Option F (Foundation) – Papers 1, 2, 5, 6

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Option Boundaries	–	–	–	64	53	42	31	20
Percentage in Grade	–	–	–	19.27	35.04	26.03	12.44	4.69
Cumulative Percentage in Grade	–	–	–	19.27	54.30	80.34	92.78	97.47

The total entry for the examination was 21 885

Report on the Components taken in June 2000

Option H (Higher) – Papers 3, 4, 5, 6

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Option Boundaries	84	73	62	51	37	30	–	–
Percentage in Grade	7.66	22.38	32.95	27.59	8.48	0.42	–	–
Cumulative Percentage in Grade	7.66	30.04	62.99	90.58	99.06	99.48	-	-

The total entry for the examination was 42 311.