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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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Introduction

Examiners commented that the texts about happiness were accessible across the full range of abilities and candidates were able to engage with the tasks and respond appropriately.

Better candidates were able to engage fully with both texts and respond thoughtfully and articulately. Their writing responses were often engaging and effective and were well controlled and accurate. Weaker candidates sometimes struggled to understand the passages and the questions. Their writing was often pedestrian or lacked coherence and had weak language controls.

Examiners commented that a significant number of candidates did not attempt to use their own words in the questions that asked for them. It is essential that candidates should try to use their own words in order to be successful in responding to these questions.

There are still candidates who copy out all or considerable sections of the extracts in response to Question 11. This can never be a successful way to respond as the candidate is required to produce their own work and show the ability to adapt the original texts for a different audience and purpose.

There are still some responses to Question 11 and 12 that lack paragraphing, not just the weaker ones. Candidates must understand that the lack of effective paragraphing will limit the success of the response.

There was evidence of some good teaching and learning in the responses and examiners commented that many candidates seemed well prepared on the whole.

Section A (Questions 1-10)

This consists of mainly short answer questions that require candidates to locate and retrieve relevant information. Some questions required candidates to use their own words. Question 10 is longer requiring candidates to give a personal response and justify it with references to the text.

There were some very good answers to questions 1-9 but many candidates continued to have difficulty with the requirement for own words thus limiting their performance.

Questions 1, 2, 6 and 7 generally produced successful responses. Where candidates lost marks on Question 1 it was because they described teenagers as 'stormy' and some simply stated that a survey had been carried out among teenagers, possibly not understanding the question. Responses to Question 2 were generally successful but some candidates copied out long sections of the text not showing their ability to select information. Question 6 was generally well answered but some candidates incorrectly identified 'happiness', 'frustration' or 'sadness', the latter two being outside the line references. Most candidates responded successfully to

Question 7 with the most common error being that some candidates did not understand 'to make the most of' and instead stated incorrectly 'to be happy most of the time'. Examiners did comment that some candidates used material that was from the wrong part of the texts in responses to these questions.

All examiners commented that responses to questions requiring candidates to use their own words (3, 4, 5, 8 and 9) quite often had direct lifting from the texts. This seems to be a continuing problem. Some examiners commented that candidates tended to use key words and phrases exactly as written in the extracts or just changed the order of the words. However some examiners commented positively on candidates' attempts to use their own words.

Some examiners commented that many candidates' responses to Question 3 were generally successful in re-wording. However, many examiners commented that many candidates did not use their own words and candidates often struggled to find alternatives to the points about alcohol and smoking, often lifting whole sentences. There was also a tendency to include the right points on drinking, smoking, eating well, but to say that these things made teenagers healthy without saying they are also associated with happiness.

Responses to Question 4 also had evidence of candidates not attempting to use their own words. Very few candidates were able to give an alternative for '30% more'. A number of candidates were unable to find alternative words to 'creativity, compassion and connection' and many examiners commented on the number of candidates who did not attempt to re-word 'creativity'. A few candidates based their answer on the wrong section of the text.

Examiners commented that responses to Question 5 were sometimes successful but many examiners again commented that candidates did not use their own words sufficiently. A number of candidates had problems understanding 'extreme poverty'. A few candidates based their answer on the wrong section of the text.

There were responses to Question 8 which again lifted words or sentences from the text such as 'outperform the stock market year on year'. Candidates often lifted 'academic attainment' and 'pupil behaviour'. A lot of candidates could not find a synonym for 'creative' or 'decisions'. Better responses tried to re-word the relevant material such as 'people make better decisions and are able to be much more imaginative in their lives'. Generally there was a huge variety on synonyms for happy e.g. elated, gleeful, joyful, cheerful, merry, contented and blissful.

Centres need to work with candidates to develop their vocabulary and reinforce that candidates must attempt to produce responses to these questions using their own words.

Question 9 - a significant number of candidates did not use their own words for their points, despite the rubric and layout of the question, which meant

they could not achieve any marks. A number of candidates used quotation marks for their points which suggested they did not understand the requirement to use their own words. Similarly a number of candidates produced paraphrases of their chosen support as their point – often too close to the text to be rewarded. However, the majority of candidates were able to identify relevant points and provide support for them. Some examiners commented that this question has been more successfully answered this year. Better responses clearly made a point in their own words such as 'happy people do not take as many risks in life' with an apt supporting quotation. When candidates had made an appropriate point in their own words they were generally able to choose appropriate support and therefore score full marks. A small number referred to the wrong sections of the text.

Centres need to continue to work with candidates to ensure they understand that they must use their own words for the point made and then provide a quotation from the text that supports the point.

Question 10 provided varied responses with most candidates able to make some sort of choice but only the more able could provide developed ideas and close reference to the texts that the task required. On the whole, candidates preferred Text Two because it was, in their opinion, better at describing the 'importance' of happiness. Some disliked that Text One was limited to happiness in teenagers. There were some clear responses to this task showing that candidates had been well prepared for this question and had a secure understanding of what is required. If candidates are able to offer two clear reasons why they have chosen a text and support them with two clear references (quotations or developed explanation) and a clear reason for not picking the other text with appropriate support they will produce a successful response. Better responses had clearly identified reasons and appropriate support for their choices.

Examiners also commented that a significant number of candidates gave two reasons and support for their chosen text and a reason for not choosing the other text without supporting it, achieving 5 marks, or gave reasons for their chosen text and for not choosing the other text but gave no support for these reasons, achieving only 3 marks. There were some candidates who only responded on their chosen text which limited their achievement. Weaker responses tended to paraphrase the texts, retelling the passages. Some weaker candidates offered very generic comments such as 'it did not interest me because the subject matter is not as interesting' or 'the vocabulary was harder to understand'. These problems suggest that some candidates have not been prepared for this task and unfortunately this limited candidates' achievement.

Some examiners commented that the responses to this question had improved this year.

Centres will need to continue to work with candidates to make sure they have a clear understanding of valid ways of responding to texts.

Section B (Question 11)

There was evidence of good teaching and learning in the responses to this section. There was some evidence of planning which was pleasing. The most useful plans were relatively short but allowed candidates to focus and organise their ideas effectively. Plans should be in the answer booklet rather than on an additional sheet.

Examiners commented positively about candidates' responses to this question and their engagement with the topic. There were a good number of lively, well written responses to this task.

Most candidates understood the requirement of the task and were able to use the appropriate register for a talk to peers. It was generally felt candidates engaged with this task and some produced lively and convincing responses. The most successful responses had a strong sense of audience and purpose and included personal touches and rhetorical language to engage the audience. Many candidates were able to adopt an appropriate register and there was clear evidence of an understanding of the purpose, audience and format required although some examiners commented that a number of candidates struggled adopt an appropriate register. Some successful responses used informal language appropriately to engage their peers. Weaker candidates often introduced themselves at the beginning but could not sustain the register.

Most candidates were able to cover the three bullet points and gave a reasonable number of relevant points. Better responses covered all three bullets in depth and the very good responses showed a sophistication incorporating and developing ideas thoroughly and engaging with their audience. Candidates who systematically planned their response around the bullet points tended to do well demonstrating how the bullet points can help focus and organisation. A lot of candidates' own ideas were also used effectively. There was a very wide range of responses to this question from those that were entirely dependent on the source material to others who did not use any of it. Many responses included personal examples of causes of happiness and unhappiness.

A number of examiners were concerned about the amount of lifting from the source texts both in the better responses, where candidates copied key words and phrases, and in weaker responses, where candidates copied whole sections of the texts. The weakest candidates simply copied the texts wholesale. Copying from the original texts affected the overall quality of the response.

Language controls were not always secure, especially grammar.

Centres should continue to work to ensure candidates have a clear idea of how to adapt ideas from texts and how to write appropriately for different audiences and purposes.

Section C (Question 12)

12b was the most popular question. There was evidence of some good preparation and teaching in this section. There was evidence of planning which is to be encouraged. However the use of very long plans or draft essays is to be discouraged as they are not a good use of time. Candidates should be encouraged to plan their response in the answer booklet rather than on separate additional sheets.

Examiners, as always, commented on how much they enjoyed reading the responses in this section.

Question 12a produced some well written responses with ambitious vocabulary and clear and developed arguments. The better ones had good vocabulary and were constructed using a range of devices for effect. Some examiners commented positively about the quality of the responses.

Most candidates based their discussion around the importance of family and friends and how these aspects make life good. The question inspired candidates to talk about their own personal experiences as well as cultural and media influences. Most were positive reflections but a few responses were satirical and some focused on war and world poverty. One examiner commented 'There were many interesting responses to this question and they were generally well-written, mature and accurate so it was a pleasure to read them especially the ones with strong moral consciences.' Some candidates used specific examples to show that life was good (or bad), while many tried to explain in almost philosophical terms why life was good. Some responses were rather pedestrian and simply retold a few anecdotal moments.

Weaker candidates sometimes wandered into narrative losing the focus of the task. Weaker candidates had problems with both maintaining a clear argument and structuring their responses.

Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar, however the weaker responses had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Centres need to ensure that candidates who choose this option are well prepared in argumentative, discursive and rhetorical techniques and are able to develop their ideas effectively.

Question 12b: The title 'A Pleasant Surprise' produced some lively and imaginative responses. Most examiners enjoyed reading the responses to this question.

There were a number of responses which achieved precision and clarity with extensive and mature vocabulary. The vast majority of candidates who attempted this question were able to produce a narrative with a reasonably clear plot. More successful candidates produced stories with clear narrative progression. Sophisticated answers occasionally had changes in time or

place, which added to the sense of drama, as well as interesting structural techniques. Better responses were fully controlled with accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar.

There were a variety of pleasant surprises, with candidates showing an attempt to bring drama and excitement into their writing. Most of the surprises involved family reunions (there were lots of fathers turning up unexpectedly), birthday parties and anniversaries of various kinds. Despite the numerous, unoriginal birthday surprises, there were many creative and interesting ideas explored. Sometimes the response became a report on the preparations rather than a narrative, losing opportunities to employ a variety of literary devices and vocabulary. Some candidates were unable to engage with a sophisticated story, and very often it became formulaic e.g. the surprise party. There were some disturbing stories involving rape or murder which suggested that some candidates did not understand the word 'pleasant'.

Weaker responses lacked development of ideas or the ability to maintain a narrative, together with poor language controls.

Centres need to ensure candidates have a secure understanding of narrative techniques and the ability to develop a coherent personal response.

Question 12c: Examiners commented that there were some very interesting responses to this title. Better responses were detailed and lively with fully developed ideas. Candidates produced some well written responses that were fully focused on the task of describing a celebration or party. Candidates who chose this response offered a range of ideas and crafted a range of differing responses. The better ones were imaginative, engaged the reader and used a wide range of vocabulary. They used powerful descriptive techniques to evoke a sense of place and time and were able to use creative imagery and ambitious vocabulary for powerful effect.

The main subjects consisted of weddings, family celebrations, surprise parties and festivals of various kinds such as Eid or New Year. The descriptions of cultural events really allowed candidates to thrive in their own environments. Some responses lacked description and became a narrative about a party or celebration.

Less successful responses tended to be somewhat hackneyed and formulaic descriptions. Weaker candidates tended to produce responses that tended to be pedestrian and lacked detail.

Better responses had full control of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Weaker candidates had poor language controls and weak paragraphing.

Centres need to ensure candidates are aware of the techniques they can use in descriptive writing and also ensure candidates develop a varied vocabulary which they can use appropriately.

Quality of Written Communication (QWC)

This is assessed in Questions 11 and 12.

Better responses were accurate using a wide range of grammatical constructions, punctuation and vocabulary.

As in previous series, there was evidence of good spelling and reasonably accurate punctuation but most examiners commented on candidates who had problems with grammar and expression. Some of this was unidiomatic English but there were also problems with tenses and sentence structure including missing words. These problems limited the effectiveness of the communication.

Examiners also commented on incorrect use of capital letters and missing capitalisation for the personal pronoun, comma splicing, missing apostrophes and misspelling of common homophones.

Some examiners commented positively about the wide range of vocabulary used but unfortunately candidates do not always use it appropriately and their writing is often unconvincing because of this.

Centres need to focus on developing accurate and effective grammatical structuring and idiomatic English to enable candidates to express themselves clearly and access the higher mark bands.

Summary

Most successful candidates:

- read the texts with insight and engagement
- selected relevant points in response to the reading questions
- used their own words in response to questions that required them
- wrote clearly with a good sense of audience and purpose in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- were able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- engaged the reader with creative writing that was clearly expressed, well developed and controlled (Question 12)
- used ambitious vocabulary
- wrote with accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Least successful candidates:

- did not engage fully with the texts
- were not able to find enough relevant points in response to the reading questions
- did not attempt to use their own words in response to questions that required them
- did not write in an appropriate register in response to Question 11
- were not able to select and adapt relevant information for Question 11
- sometimes copied from the original texts in response to Question 11
- were not able to sustain and develop ideas clearly in response to Section C (Question 12)
- did not demonstrate accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

