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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

Paper 8004/01, 02 and 03

General comments

One of the most heartening comments that has been made consistently this year by Examiners is that the general level in the standard of expression has risen across the Centres. This has been reflected in the award of the Use of English mark rising, on average, from the second to the third level.

Of particular note is the fact that candidates are making sound use of definitions in their introductions. It indicates a systematic approach and enables the candidate to focus specifically on what the question is concerned with.

In conjunction with this the more widespread practice of taking time to write a plan and then to follow it is also paying dividends.

There do remain other areas that require attention, however. Perhaps the most pressing of these is the apparent determination of the candidate to offer as much information as possible on any given topic, and on tangential topics that only border the original in terms of relevance. As always, quality is the primary concern, not quantity. This has been particularly evident in the introduction. Candidates have taken the opportunity to provide far too much information or provenance, to be a background to a topic. A question that saw this happening invariably was **Question 11** on television. Many discoursed upon the pre-Industrial Revolution period through to the advent of the wide screen surround sound system in great detail, perhaps for a page or more, before beginning their response to the effect of the television on the family. This was largely digressive and a waste of time.

Candidates often make lists of facts within their essays. These are frequently devoid of any links to points past or arising. Essays should have fluency, a flow of information and opinion that lead the reader through an argument to a point of evaluation and decision.

Equally, a succession of questions, without any attempt to answer them, causes irritation and interruption to the flow of the response. Lists and questions should be discouraged from the academic essay.

One new and disconcerting trend this year that has been noted across many Centres has been the use of improvised quotations. These often read as though they have been invented on the spur of the moment, to support an often tenuous viewpoint. There is no worth in providing a quotation without accreditation.

As will be seen in the section on specific questions, exemplification is variable. It is not possible to answer any question that asks a candidate to assess, for example, art, literature, international agreements etc. without making mention of one artist, writer or international agreement. It is a basic requirement to exemplify factual information.

A final comment in this section must be made about the use of material that has been learned. There is considerable evidence that some candidates are still learning model answers and are determined to utilise these, no matter what the remit of their chosen question. Inevitably this renders their essay digressive and, to a large extent, irrelevant.

Use of English

As stated earlier there has been a commendable increase in the standards of expression. Only a very small percentage of candidates now write material that is virtually incomprehensible, whilst the vast majority are fluent, showing systematic arguments and logical development which is weighed and balanced in an accurate and appropriate tone.

There are occasions where subject and verb agreement still needs to be addressed.

The selection of the correct tense also causes confusion to a number of candidates and there is a tendency to mix tenses within an essay.

Spelling is not the problem that it once was, fortunately, but Examiners do find it irksome to see candidates misspelling words that are clearly written within the body of the question.

It was also noted that there was, this year, an extravagance of qualification of adjectives; for example, "very essential", "quite unique", "extremely disastrous" were common.

Other frequent errors included the use of "one" as the subject of the sentence, followed by the possessive "their/him/her"; an incorrect use of the definite and indefinite articles; an overuse of the semicolon where a comma would have sufficed; the joining together of words inappropriately, for example, "alot" for a lot, "maybe" for may be; the beginning of sentences with "and" and "also" in order to give the impression of a link when there was not; and a universal flaw "the television".

Crossings out and poor, usually small, handwriting led to difficulties in deciphering what the candidate was attempting to convey. This was often accompanied this year by the new and often redundant usage of brackets, for example "the United Nations (U.N)".

Combined with this was a further new phenomenon, the extraordinary flowering of individual, indeed home grown, abbreviation (as well as the more ubiquitous "eg", "TV", "+", "ie"). Many candidates went as far as providing a key to explain them. This is certainly not something to be encouraged. Examiners expect to see essays written in proper English, no note form, abbreviation, numbered points or, as in one Centre, the use of ditto marks underneath a word from the line above.

Many Examiners noted that the most common and fallacious opening to a sentence was "on a whole".

Colloquial expression still dominates some essays, where the tone is comparable to that of a tabloid newspaper. Most disliked is the use of the word "well", but others abound, for example, "according to me", "let me tell you" and "what do you think?"

There is one remaining issue where candidates would benefit from advice, and that is in the construction of the conclusion. Many are flat and bland, merely repeating in a perfunctory way the tenets earlier outlined. Some are one sentence in length, dismissive and making no attempt to summarise argument or opinion.

A surprising number of candidates see the conclusion as a place to introduce new material, often without linkage or relevance to what has gone before. This is entirely inappropriate.

The conclusion should be the paragraph that asserts in a firm and effective way a reinforcement of the facts and/or the opinions that have been delivered in the essay. It should, in the case of the more esoteric questions, be the point at which the candidate offers a personal decision or judgement, having looked at all the various strands available.

Conclusions which are not dogmatic but, rather, which have a tentative quality can leave the essay open; this suggests that it has been a spring board for further thought and discussion.

Marks can be lost when the essay merely stops or repeats itself in a tedious manner. The conclusion is as important as the introduction. It is from this paragraph that the Examiner leaves the essay and the tone of it will affect the overall assessment of the entire essay.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Can international agreements be really effective?

This question required a basic understanding of the term "international agreement". There was a wide variety of types of agreement from which a candidate could select, including trade, political, economic, environmental, let alone military. Many wrote simply in terms of peace treaties at the conclusion of wars, Versailles being the most common one referred to.

There seemed to be an air of general confusion between international agreements, international organisations and international action. The latter provoked much invective about the recent action taken against Iraq.

Examples that were offered ranged from the United Nations, to the Geneva Convention; the many informed references made to CARICOM and to the Kyoto discussions.

Enforcement was an area that was almost universally overlooked. It could have been assessed, perhaps the number of signatories, by the changes effected and abided by in real terms, by the lobbying of others to support change, by any legislative changes or economic consequences.

The major weakness in responding to this question came through vagueness that seemed to mask a lack of serious knowledge. Combined with few attempts to assess the efficacy of international agreements, few candidates gained substantial marks for content. In many cases it was puzzling to understand why this question had been selected.

Not one candidate offered any perspective or opinion on their local societal position, even in the regard of terrorism.

Question 2

Is there any value in studying the history of other countries?

Many candidates appeared to have stopped reading the question at the word "history", omitting "the". There was, of course, some pertinence in stating briefly the value of studying history but this was taken to extremes by some, indeed to the total length of the essay.

Examiners had expected to see the thesis that understanding and communication are aided greatly through the study of history across this increasingly shrinking global environment.

It had been hoped that candidates would examine some of the major political tenets by their economic implications. It might have been expected that the lessons of democracy and free trade could have been contrasted with totalitarianism and protectionism.

Colonialism, imperialism and tribal structures did feature in the more aware scripts. Yet many candidates spent far too long dwelling on the historical heavyweight personalities and their impact. Another emotive incident was the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of September 11th. There was very little reference made to anything before twentieth century history, other than colonialism and slavery. Even the historians amongst candidates had a narrow, modern view and range of examples.

Question 3

"Crime affects the whole of society, not just the immediate victims." Discuss.

Whilst applauding, earlier, the value and more widespread use of definition, this question was one where there was too much definition offered. "Crime" was certainly apposite to define; yet "society" and "victim" were not necessary in such depth as most afforded them.

In addition many candidates spent many pages providing detail of sociological surveys and writers. Almost without exception this was digressive and superfluous to the requirement of the question.

Many became side tracked and wrote about the causes of crime. Again this was not relevant. There are still those candidates who seem to think that if they rewrite the question in their own words and put this at the top of their essay, it will be acceptable to answer their own rewritten version. Or they may take another approach – to put a side heading, for example, "the causes of crime" and then address that. Such a response can only gain limited marks.

Effective answers drew upon local experience, in Trinidad the high incidence of kidnaps and in Pakistan the degree of political corruption. These made interesting and pertinent reading.

The major weakness in the responses to this question lay in the lack of balance demonstrated. The wording of the question makes it very clear that there are two separate domains to be looked at here – society and the individual victim. Almost all ignored the second, yet were voluble about the first, providing information about international reputation, the tourist industry, the escalating economic consequences, the withdrawal of foreign investment etc.

Few considered the effect upon the victim, other than in the case of rape, which seemed to attract little interest and commentary.

Some candidates offered an almost hysterical description of rampaging crime on every street corner, read as naïve attempts to be controversial.

What was required here was solid analysis rather than emotive or over-anecdotal description.

Question 4

Are single-sex schools preferable to mixed ones?

This question required a personal decision from all candidates and most did fulfil this, though responses tended to be long and anecdotal.

A problem for candidates from the Caribbean appeared to be that single-sex schools are often run by religious orders, and are fee paying, and are therefore deemed to be of a higher status and reputation. This was often perceived as being of more importance than academic records.

There was an undeniable and alarming homophobic element. Ironically many candidates from single-sex Centres laid great emphasis on this aspect as being a real threat to young people, whilst also declaring that it was quite beyond their experience of that institution. Alarmist views thus prevailed without supporting evidence; this diluted their arguments.

The major emphasis was upon the future relationships of the individual – life requires us to be integrated, thus the sooner we can learn that lesson through practical experience the better.

This question suffered from a lack of real academic thought and analysis; there were many areas that could have been discussed – discipline, academic success, sexual experimentation, sport, extra curricular activities, toleration, personal skills – in addition to homosexuality and distraction.

Question 5

“When considering a career the most important issue is money.” Do you agree?

There was an almost universal condemnation of people who choose a career based on remuneration. Yet there was also widespread confusion, as some interpreted the question as meaning that no career choice could be exercised without the necessary financial backing for training and the qualifications. This was not quite the intention of the question but those who argued persuasively enough did not lose marks.

The importance of fringe benefits was rarely seen with any breadth, but there was a vast array from which to choose – pension, sickness/maternity benefits, promotional prospects, an absence of stress, congenial working environment being the most popular.

Sociological theory was also a feature of many responses and Examiners became very familiar with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. On occasion focus was lost in an endeavour to impress.

Section 2

Question 6

How far can poor countries afford to show concern for the environment?

This is without doubt the one topic area that all candidates learn a prepared answer for, and no matter what the wording of the question, pages are written about the greenhouse effect, overpopulation and deforestation. Such a resolute desire to describe the general environmental degradation inflicted upon the world by the first world nations fails to gain marks for content when the wording of the question is ignored, no matter how factually accurate or wide ranging the information that is offered.

Examiners expected to find a definition of “poor countries” and some named examples. These were frequently missing which gave the essays a vague air. The impetus to achieve a sustainable economic position to support the indigenous population is the priority that should have been identified. The dilemma of having to industrialise, with the attendant problem of over-exploitation of natural resources, was also an area worth consideration.

Measures can and are being taken in some countries to encourage environmental awareness. Small, non-costly steps such as education, anti-litter campaigns and more local ones like Nepal's wood burning stove were mentioned by some. This was the appropriate domain to be in, as would have been ASEAN, the wider regional clean up protocol. Such examples would have strengthened responses by identifying the vital role played by home management.

Candidates should be advised in the strongest way possible that essays on the environment are almost universally the ones which score the lowest marks. This is not due to any lack of understanding or information about the topic, rather it is a failure to look at what the question requires. It is the clearest example of disregarding the remit of the question and the squandering of marks.

Question 7

Consider the problem of noise in society and ways to reduce it.

This was a straightforward question, especially by comparison with the one that preceded it. Many answers were, however, simplistic and list-like, with long descriptions of types of music emanating from vehicles, the customary and pervasive use of the horn, generally loud machinery from all factories and fights between neighbours that increase in volume in direct proportion to the level of violence.

Few considered the prolongation of noise, air traffic and heavy agricultural machinery, thus limiting the range of discussion.

Candidates, beyond stating that legislation would be a panacea, often ignored remedies. Sound-proofing, measuring decibel levels, the role of Environmental Agencies, public education campaigns, limitations of use and time constraints, particularly in the urban arena, were barely given a mention.

It would have been encouraging to see any discussion of the difficulties of enforcing measures, let alone an awareness of the difference between individual and corporate responsibility.

Question 8

"Mathematics is a challenging subject, but of little practical use." Discuss.

This elicited responses that fell into one of two categories – those who looked simply at the everyday application of maths and numbers, from shopping to time measurement, and those who knew a lot about concepts of maths and were able to examine the challenge. This challenge embraces the stimulus to the intellect and is the bastion of the formula to understand the origins of life.

There was additionally from this second group of candidates an awareness of the foundation of maths for allied sciences.

It had been anticipated, indeed feared, that many candidates would use this topic as a forum to provide purely anecdotal, hour by hour, lists of activities concerning number. This was not found and denotes a change in the way that mathematics is approached in General Paper discussion.

Question 9

Are mobile phones more of a nuisance than a benefit?

This was one of the most popular questions on the paper this year, touching on youth culture in a direct way. Almost universally candidates attempted to provide balance, which was pleasing, looking at both the nuisance and benefit aspects.

One area of superfluous information was the provenance of the mobile phone. Many went back to smoke signals and drums, extending the scope of the historical perspective beyond credulity.

There were two possible avenues of discussion that did not merit much attention apparently in the minds of the candidates, cost and health implications. The latter has received a lot of media attention, yet this potentially controversial aspect was often missing.

The remainder, features, status and emergency use were contrasted with noise pollution and interruption of meetings, the school day and even funerals. Some went on to consider the crime potential too.

Almost all candidates sitting General Paper own a mobile phone it would appear, yet despite the declared necessity of these devices to everyday life many of the answers were formulaic and lacked dynamism.

Almost without exception a decision was made.

Question 10

“Migration is always a consequence of human conflict.” Discuss.

A surprisingly large number of candidates misread or misinterpreted this question, taking “consequence” to mean cause. There was scope, which the more discerning candidates took, to conclude their essays with a brief consideration of the problems caused by a massive influx of migrants to a region.

A key word in the question was “always”; this was intended to be contentious, many ignored it.

It had been anticipated that the term migration would be defined, either in the social geographical sense or in the international demographic sense.

The weaker essays tried to link conflict to all the reasons given for migration, sometimes with comic overtones – where people who were retiring were said to be in conflict with cold weather and therefore needed to move to warmer areas.

Others classed going to work, holidays and medical procedures abroad as migration, which they patently are not.

Human conflict was well exemplified - war, ethnic cleansing, religious persecution and the abuse of human rights were all dealt with suitably.

Yet there are other factors apart from human conflict that can produce migration, and these may be equally compelling - climate crisis, famine, natural disaster and environmental degradation due to anachronistic farming practices. These were frequently missing, thus creating an imbalance.

Section 3**Question 11**

Assess the impact of the television on the family.

This was the most popular question on the paper. It was alarming that many candidates (some 60%) chose to ignore the last three words “on the family” and simply wrote in very general terms, at length, on the effects of television on society.

Equally, the vast majority wrote at too great a length and in too much detail about the development of television from pre-industrial times to today.

Some candidates see television as the harbinger of all doom to society, leading to the very fabric of society being destroyed, the divorce rate escalating, broken homes abounding and the crime rate increasing. In fact many think that it will be the ultimate agent of the complete disappearance of the family unit. This is gross exaggeration.

Many who did at least try to focus on the family with more realism did not treat it as an entity but as a group of individuals, belonging to various generations.

There was immense potential within this topic yet most brought it to the level of extreme influence in an immature manner.

Television does offer entertainment to all members of a family. It can herald great educational value across the generations, broadening horizons and disseminating cultural diversity. It also provides a platform for the youth of today to put pressure on their parents via advertising influences and shopping channels to buy unnecessary goods and thus pander to consumerism. It is arguably the most important and life-changing invention to enter the home since electricity.

Very few of these considerations were even looked at in passing.

Again, candidates must be warned of the danger of seeing a word and then launching into a regurgitation of every fact and every opinion they can muster on that word, rather than considering the implications of the question carefully.

Question 12

Does effective communication require the written or the spoken word?

Many candidates took the question to indicate that an either/or approach had to be adopted, thus limiting their answers from the outset.

Without a definition of “effective communication”, many floundered, not having anything concrete on which to base their assessment criteria. This was one of the few questions that did not prompt a definition, yet it was essential.

A very few candidates did enter into lengthy explanations and descriptions about sign language, Braille, body language, facial expressions and even in one instance, grunting.

Many confined their remarks to a business or work place setting and discussed what was being communicated rather than the means of doing so.

Such ideas as immediacy, elaboration, teaching skills, precision or even equipment were only rarely encountered. As to effective communication being possible via, for example, mime, dance, photograph or art - this was not in evidence anywhere.

Question 13

How do you account for the appeal of musicals in the cinema?

This was a question that was chosen by only a few candidates. Those who did select it displayed a real enthusiasm and interest in the genre, providing examples and relating personal enjoyment. Analysis was evident and engaging.

Musicals in the cinema present a contrast to the often frighteningly realistic action films, giving light relief and the element of theatrical entertainment and extravagance.

Most candidates who wrote an answer to this question looked at the topic in this manner, and it made a welcome contrast to some of the more turgid pages of detail about environmental degradation.

Question 14

“Old buildings must always be sacrificed to progress.” Discuss.

This was a particular opportunity for candidates to give Examiners a flavour of their societies, taking them on a verbal tour of their local architectural heritage. Examples should have abounded in this context.

Some did write in this vein and these essays were those which gained good content marks. Others took a more extreme stance and nominated capital cities, usually European, saying what a travesty it would be to remove castles and cathedrals, one even citing Stonehenge. This reflected a naive perception of what the question was about.

Progress was interpreted by the more aware candidates as incorporating the good of the community, usually in economic terms, and even in adding to the international prestige of the nation.

Many did seem confused by the term “old buildings”, substituting *derelict* for “old”. This meant that they ignored the cultural fingerprint that such buildings provide for future generations.

Many ignored the word “always” which was intended to be provocative. It was this provocation, though, which ironically was the justification for the candidate who nominated Stonehenge as suitable for sacrifice, in the interests of modernising that area of England.

Question 15

How important are the local artists, such as painters, writers and musicians in your society?

The words "in your society" are clear, yet some candidates refused to see them. Invariably those candidates wrote about the importance of art in terms of literature, based on Shakespeare.

Many concentrated on musicians to a disproportionate extent, although the power of reggae and socca, steelpan and calypso are undeniable. Yet the word used in the question is "and", not *or*. This led to some imbalance in essays.

There was a justifiable degree of pride in writers such as V.S. Naipaul and their role as ambassadors for their countries.

Carnival in Trinidad also elicited some sensible commentary about the social, political and educational value of shared artistic experience. The attendant boost to the economy via tourism was not overlooked.

The balance of artistic creation with the mundane and tedious in our lives was well perceived by the more articulate candidates. Many of the responses to this question were both informative and a delight to read.