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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 8004/01-03

General comments

It was notable this year that there was a real engagement with the selected topics by a large number of candidates. Many made a wise choice of question, particularly for their first response; this was not always evident in their second choice, however. Questions that drew the best from candidates were **Question 2** on the handicapped, **Question 12** on Music, and **Question 10** on Cosmetic surgery. Marks were often high for these questions because the candidates had plenty of opinions and a broad range of views and knowledge to express. It was commendable that a significant number of candidates were writing essays of systematic argument, reflective and mature analysis.

Across the candidature, marks for content were usually higher for content than for use of English. One positive way of interpreting this might be to see it as pleasing evidence of more wider reading going on, as opposed to reliance on presentation of learned material specifically prepared for the examination in the hope that that topic would appear.

There was evidence of much better time management by most candidates this session. Almost everyone wrote two essays of equal or similar length, with evidence of thought and planning. Fewer candidates fell into the trap of equating length with strength this session.

There were relatively few infringements of the rubric.

Mechanical errors notwithstanding, the overall levels of fluency have continued to improve.

A disturbing trend that Examiners noted this session concerns the use of a sub heading, or a generic title, at the outset of the essay. This was seen particularly in response to **Question 7**, where a significant number of candidates wrote "*Pollution*", or "*Global warming*". This immediately alerted the Examiner to the fact that the candidate was not making the wording of the question the priority of the essay, but rather the essay would be about that general heading, invariably a learned topic. This gave ample scope for digression and a redirection of the question.

Another difficult area appeared with regard to the question selected. It was particularly striking with **Question 1** on the law. Candidates had obviously anticipated that this topic would appear on the examination paper. They chose it, but without understanding of the concept of justification.

Colloquialism seems to be the scourge of the essays this session. Examiners repeatedly commented that essays, whilst fluent, read as though they were from the tabloid press, with incomplete sentences and 'soundbite' approaches. This is not what the examination is expecting or requiring. Examiners expect to read essays written in an appropriate, academic tone.

Many candidates are showing that they know the importance of definition, yet the misunderstanding of the concept of justification was overwhelming in **Question 1**. If there is any doubt in the mind of candidates about any word in a question, then they really should not contemplate choosing that question.

Exemplification is particularly essential in certain topics. Questions from this paper that required this especially were **Question 4**, on history books; **Question 5**, on financial organisations; **Question 12** on music, **Question 13** on books, and **Question 15** on objects from ancient societies. Frequently essays were written with no reference to examples at all.

Another area that has given cause for concern has been relevance. A question always gives direction in the wording about the proposed domain that is required. Two questions that suffered major elements of digression were **Question 5** on financial organisations and **Question 4** on history books. Both prompted essays of great and rambling length that were anything but relevant. The recognition of a single word or phrase should not trigger an essay that rapidly regurgitates every remotely related fact or opinion that coincide with that topic.

Examiners welcome fresh and original opinion and commentary. There is no need to adopt a viewpoint that is 'safe'.

So often Examiners feel that the candidates have not re-read what they are submitting; if they had, at least 50% of the mechanical errors might have been recognised and put right. Reading back to oneself, albeit silently and in the head, would alert candidates to any glaring errors that they have made.

Some Examiners complained about poor or illegible handwriting. Handwriting is, of course, not assessed, but candidates who submit work that is difficult to read can do themselves no favours.

Use of English

Scripts ranged from the virtually incomprehensible to the impressively fluent. The disparity between the two was more extreme this year.

Concise arguments, which are to the point and succinct, deploying systematic and logical approach, did reflect the more mature candidate who was able to express, balance and summarise a range of often sophisticated theses. By contrast there were essays of over-ambitious and flowery vocabulary, which had been memorised and determinedly employed, with much that was copiously repetitious and generalised, lacking a conclusion and comprising little of substance.

As has been noted so many times before, there is no worth in pages of information only vaguely related to the subject. Quality is welcomed, quantity for the sake of filling the pages is not.

The structure of the essay still remains an issue. Candidates usually know that they need to provide an introduction, a passage of development and a conclusion. However, this can become far too simplistically formulaic. Many scripts were disappointing because of over-lengthy introductions, comprising a list of points to be considered; enumeration of those points in the body of the essay, but frequently without any linkage or exemplification; and a 'conclusion' merely reiterating of what has gone before, often in exactly the same language or phraseology. In such cases no argument or train of thought was developed and much extraneous material included.

A further feature of the structure of the essay this session has been the writing of a statement, followed by a complete contradiction of that statement as alleged evidence of a contrary argument. This is, of course, not an acceptable or viable way to present two sides of an argument or opinion.

Candidates should check everything they have written carefully for spelling, sentence construction and basic grammatical agreement. They need to ask themselves whether what they are writing communicates relevant information, in response to the specific requirements of the questions.

The most common mechanical errors or slips noted by Examiners were:

- "a/so" frequently used as a conjunction, or to link sentences
- a common use of "etc." to terminate list-like phrases or paragraphs
- nouns and verbs not agreeing in number
- incorrect verb forms
- "one" as the subject of the sentence followed by the possessive their/him/her
- words running together ("alot", "apart" (for "a part"), "maybe" (for "may be") being the most frequently noted)
- exclamation marks used to create false emphasis
- lack of commas, impeding the flow of the sentence
- carelessness over use of the possessive nouns
- missing links between paragraphs, with leaps of topic and opinion jarring the reading.

One of the phrases that appeared in many scripts was *“in a nutshell”* to begin the conclusion. In one Centre, ninety out of one hundred candidates used this phrase, accompanied by a large amount of colloquial expression. It was common for such candidates to address the Examiner in such terms as *“well, as you will likely have seen from me”*. This is not the type of approach guaranteed to score high marks for use of English in an academic essay.

There was a pleasing level of vocabulary from many of the candidates, but by contrast many others seem to have entered the examination room with a list of words that they were determined to use in their essays. Such attempts to impress are invariably hollow and unconvincing.

The choice of question remains crucial to success. Candidates need to engage with the topic and have sufficient understanding of the question’s wording to be able to tackle it with confidence. There appear to have been several questions this session that threw some candidates as they proceeded with their responses. It seems that they saw the topic, chose the question on the basis of knowing something about that topic, but not looking closely at what the question was seeking to focus upon. The most notable example of this was **Question 1** where hardly anyone understood the term “justified”. **Question 4**, History, was answered almost without fail, with the word “reliable” being ignored totally. “Cosmetic” in **Question 10**, was often treated literally, erroneously. Few understood what the concept of the “art form” was in **Question 14**.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Can breaking the law ever be justified?

This was a very popular question but many responses across the range of candidates were marred by a basic misunderstanding of the term *“justified”*. It was confused with “justice”, with an accompanying concentration on a poor judiciary system and weak law enforcement. Many demonstrated an understanding of the need for law as a means of social control and were able to define the rule of law. Many, though, were defining in pragmatic terms rather than moral, which was the thrust of the question.

Many wrote about political acts of terrorism, freedom fighters, and civil insurrection against despotic regimes, and some included discussion of abortion and euthanasia. There was a tendency to deal with these with in a somewhat emotive manner, but they largely had relevance. Some candidates spent far too long writing about the causes of crime. One area where candidates seemed to offer far too much anecdotal and emotive detail was traffic offences.

Only the most able candidates considered religious law, and it was rare to see an essay considering the use of mitigation. Few came to a conclusion about the word “ever” in the question.

Question 2

How effectively are the needs of the handicapped met in your society?

It was notable that there was a huge disparity between described treatment of the handicapped by candidates even within the same Centre, let alone different societies. Some would declare that everything that could be done was being done. Others would assert the opposite, that there were glaring inadequacies.

Many scripts were marred by continual use of the term “the handicaps”, made more irksome by the fact that the correct term was printed in the question. On occasion ‘handicapped’ was taken to mean elderly. Few considered mental ill health.

Some candidates produced very list-like essays, without any attempt at evaluation, despite the wording “how effectively”.

Question 3

“Politics has no appeal to the younger generation since it has no impact on their lives.” Discuss.

Candidates living in a dynamic political framework or a climate of change tended to tackle this question in a perceptive and informed manner. Most other candidates selecting this question concentrated on the issue of corruption. There was universal contempt shown to those ‘elders and betters’ who opted to take this path and this was cited as a prime reason why youth is apathetic about politics. Exemplification reinforced this suitably in the majority of cases. What discussion that took place beyond this domain was centred on the poverty/wealth divide.

“No appeal” was frequently taken to mean “no significance for”. One primary reason that youth are disinterested in politics was given in many answers as the need for instant gratification. This was argued with veritas and considerable humility by many.

The general thesis presented by those choosing this question rested upon the fact that youth cannot be expected to be more mature than their years and experience allow. It is pleasing to report that there were, in fact, some essays on this topic that far exceed Examiners’ expectations.

Question 4

How far do history books provide reliable evidence about the past?

This was a question that exercised those who took it, but rarely to any significant depth.

Most of the essays were very generalised. Sacred books were often taken as a primary source of “truth”. Written and photographic (usually televisual) sources were often accepted as primary and honest evidence, without thought being given to manipulation or bias.

The word “reliable” was ignored by most candidates, and few attempted to look at state-directed histories, of which there are many examples. The question of manipulation after the event, or during wartime via propaganda, was ignored.

The more successful essays dealt with colonialism and slavery, which obviously had resonance for many Centres. Here was an opportunity to discuss the value and reliability of oral traditions of history, but this was usually ignored.

Certainly it would have been expected that candidates would offer at least some examples to support their arguments. This happened only very infrequently, with some reference to commonly used school textbooks. Unfortunately many candidates selected this question unwisely, without thought to the amount of pertinent information they could bring to the topic. Many candidates wanted to redirect the question to a consideration of the value of studying history.

Question 5

Assess the effect of financial organisations on the developing world.

Many candidates studying economics bombarded Examiners with vast tracts of economic theory, couched in seemingly impenetrable economic language and not necessarily relevant to the terms of the question. Much local information was offered about banks, building societies and multinational conglomerates.

What the question actually required was an analysis of the international organisations that proffer help to developing countries. This is usually at a practical level: e.g. aid to construct infrastructure, empower health campaigns and finance welfare and social planning. Two key institutions involved here are the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Many candidates realised this and had knowledge about them but not there responses were not sufficiently analytical or deep. The customary comments appeared about foreign aid and the dependency syndrome, but there was scant regard for the very recent and well-publicised endeavours to address debt alleviation.

Section 2

Question 6

“Space research is carried out more for political than scientific purpose.” Is this fair comment?

This had a far higher take up than questions on theme of space have had in previous papers. Responses tended to fall in to one of two categories: either political or scientific analysis. Few attempted both, which was what the terms of the question required.

In general, those who concentrated on the political aspect seemed to have more knowledge, with plenty of detail appearing about the Cold war and the race between the USSR and the USA. There was a variety of speculations about whether the moon landing was a hoax and about the military ambitions of countries intending to launch star wars scenarios against their enemy.

At the scientific level there was less substantive detail about the actual advances made, usually telecommunications being the only nominated topic. Weather predictions, natural disaster warnings, medical experiments, and scientific tests regarding weightlessness all receded as candidates looked at the possibility of transporting people out to alternative universes, sometimes stretching the bounds of credulity rather too far. Some candidates are clearly fans of the science fiction, but it was disappointing to find it becoming confused with current reality.

Question 7

Can renewable resources ever meet all our energy needs?

Many candidates spent a long time and countless pages establishing what the status quo is with regard to non-renewable resources. A brief introductory paragraph would have sufficed.

Some also spent time producing lists of the consequences of environmental degradation with unsupported speculation about what this would mean for the future of humankind, even to the extent of having to explore other galaxies as a remedy for our suffocating planet.

The more realistic responses offered an informed amount of information about the various alternative renewable resources. Few went on to examine the need for secondary industrialisation to make the renewable power resources available widely, and even fewer to offer consideration of the costs of this. Similarly, the topics of sustainability, the storage of power, and transportation from outlet to needy locations were not afforded much evaluation. Examiners had anticipated that there might be some constructive criticism of ‘first world’ nations and their lack of environmental responsibility, but this seldom occurred.

Question 8

“Mathematics possesses not only truth but supreme beauty.” What is your view?

Only a few candidates selected this question.

It was intended to be a free response question, allowing those candidates who were inspired by mathematics to have a forum to express their view. Some wrote simply about the uses of mathematics, which was inadequate.

By contrast, others were able to provide inspired responses that showed an appreciation of the beauty of mathematics within symmetry, both via nature and man-made objects, for example through architecture.

Question 9

Would you agree that the Internet undermines personal thought and imagination?

Far too many candidates who tackled this squandered marks because they blatantly redirected or ignored the question wording.

Many appeared not to understand the word “*undermine*”, and a great number took “*personal thought and imagination*” to mean moral fibre, which then launched them into pages of diatribe about the corrupting influence of pornography bomb making sites, and so forth. Such areas could certainly have had a place within an appropriate response, but certainly not to the extent of excluding all else.

This subject is not only one that is topical in the age of computer technology and telecommunications; it was felt by Examiners to be one that young people would have particular and direct experience of. Some candidates were keen to demonstrate their awareness of the dangers of plagiarism, especially with regard to homework (although they failed to consider that plagiarism can happen with books too). Few addressed the “*imagination*” aspect, but those who did quoted the creation of web sites and the devising of games as suitable and relevant examples.

This question did require a decision to be made and largely it was.

Question 10

“Cosmetic surgery is mere vanity.” Discuss.

This was a popular question that prompted stimulating and enjoyable essays. There were some very good answers and Examiners were heartened by the scathing criticism of the cult of the superficial. Such commentary did not compromise the rationality of argument, nor was it couched in a colloquial tone.

As mentioned earlier, a surprising number of candidates interpreted “*cosmetic*” literally. This did not preclude them going on to demonstrate more appropriate understanding. Others felt that all elderly people were handicapped by age.

Moral and ethical dimensions and the topics of remedial medical treatment and psychological reconstruction were all evaluated by the majority. Some proffered examples of local or tribal customs as a reflection of cultural mores that other societies may find difficult to understand.

Section 3

Question 11

Do photographers have the right to capture anyone or anything on camera?

On the whole this question was characterised by a rather narrow discussion of privacy, with the ubiquitous Princess Diana being the most frequently named example. Very little was seen on areas such as the public’s right to know, war photography and location photography.

The term “*capture*” was confusing to some who inferred that it meant physical abduction.

There was inference from many candidates that there is a certain irony in the fact that celebrities often denounce the very vehicle by which they gain their star status. This was a point that many essays would have benefited from developing.

A definite decision was required and provided by all.

Question 12

“Music is meant for relaxation, nothing more.” Do you agree?

This was another very popular question.

Many candidates were able to give local exemplification and were fluent in their discussion of the various functions of music beyond relaxation. There was a concentration on modern pop music, which was generally broadly based and appropriate, and reflective of the interests and tastes of the candidates.

This type of question positively invites knowledge via exemplification, and those candidates who did not attain the higher range of marks for content were usually those who did not give examples.

Question 13

Assess the value of reading books from cultures other than your own.

This was one of the least well answered questions on the paper, largely because candidates did not seem to appreciate what the question was asking about. Too often answers focused on travel guides, and almost all candidates who selected this question took it from the point of reading *about*, not *from* other cultures. This caused answers to be tangential.

Very few examples of literary books were found in answers. Many essays were little more than a generalised commentary on the value of learning and thus becoming more tolerant of other cultures.

Question 14

Consider the claim of the cinema to be the highest art form.

A definition was a prerequisite, and once again it was obvious that a number of candidates selecting this had no real understanding of the term “*art form*”.

There were occasional excellent responses to this by those who were keen enthusiasts of this genre. They were able to see the cinema as a hybrid of several other art forms. By contrast, it was disappointing to find some candidates defining cinema in terms of the actual building and screen dimensions.

Question 15

Do objects from ancient societies, such as pottery and paintings, have any value?

This had little take up, and responses were usually disappointing. Those who did select it were often digressive, using examples that were beyond the remit of the question.

“*Value*” was explored in one of two ways, either historical – leading us to understanding of past societies and living patterns, or financial – via auction and collection status. Aesthetic significance, educational value, rarity and sheer antiquity were hardly ever considered. Specialist knowledge was not a requirement here, but there was little evidence of any informed understanding about ancient societies.