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FOREWORD

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

GENERAL PAPER

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

<p>Paper 8004/01 – 03 General Paper</p>

General comments

The selection of questions demonstrated that candidates had a sufficiently wide and stimulating choice on this year's papers. The evidence of planning was apparent and those candidates who did employ this technique seemed to have a discernible structure to their essays. There are candidates who insist on using a list approach, or numbered points; this is not appropriate in an academic essay, though could be utilised towards the end of an essay if time is running out.

Introductions and conclusions are still a little problematical for some. A common feature of a weak introduction is a chatty and anecdotal approach to the topic that is not then linked to the ensuing paragraphs. Conclusions are not utilised in the most effective way, to summarise points or opinions that have been reached throughout the course of the essay, but often merely repeat material word for word from previous paragraphs. Practice in writing summary paragraphs might help to improve in this area.

Examiners do look for an attempt at balance within responses, especially in questions where opinion is being sought, for example, **Questions 2, 4, 8, 11** from 8001. One-sided statements that follow one particular avenue cannot gain the highest marks available.

Examiners are alarmed to note an increase in candidates' allegiance to television and the Internet, rather than to reading, which manifests itself in a journalistic style of expression. Reading of quality newspapers, magazines and books is important for those who wish to succeed in General Paper, as it assists their written eloquence and tone.

Use of English

Examiners have reported quite a divergence in the length of essays this session; many candidates wrote about 500 words, many more wrote twice that amount. Quantity does not necessarily equate with quality and many lost the thread of their arguments: succinct writing is preferable. It was also seen that many candidates had spent a considerable amount of time counting the number of words written.

This time would have been better utilised in editing their essays and eliminating the minor grammatical errors.

All too often, and notably in the longer scripts, candidates adopted a tone more appropriate to everyday conversation with friends, scattering learnt vocabulary and phrases rather at random.

Overlong sentences appear to be less frequent, although many candidates favour the use of the comma and the slash, and there was a rising incidence this year of abbreviations. Again this has the effect of robbing the essay of gravitas.

Tone and fluency were sometimes inhibited by the use of inappropriate phrases such as *'I want to write...'* and *'I forgot to mention..'*

Although many are successful in linking paragraphs, others find this more difficult. Candidates might improve in this area by the practice of writing essays and then analysing how well the language flows.

The attention of candidates should be drawn to the recommendation to use black or dark blue ink, and to ensure that their handwriting can be read.

Content

In every question there are key or command words. These include *'discuss'*, *'assess'*, *'how far'*, *'do you agree?'*, *'is this fair comment?'*

These should indicate that a degree of discussion, reflecting various factors or types of factual information, is required. Certainly when the word *'fair'* is included, agreement or disagreement is demanded. Some questions do require a decision to be made and candidates try to prevaricate, seemingly reluctant to come down on one side or the other.

It is typical of many responses to find that the object of the question is not addressed. A word is seized upon and everything that the candidate knows about that is written. A prime example of this was the question on nuclear energy. The vast majority of candidates wrote about nuclear weaponry and the 1945 bombs, and made only passing reference to nuclear production of energy, with the consequence that content marks had to be low. No matter how factually accurate or informed a response is, if it is not relevant, candidates cannot achieve high marks.

Exemplification is more widespread than in the past, but there are still Centres where candidates are not being advised to provide examples where possible. The question on young people's magazines and the question on works of art are cases in point. Local exemplification is interesting for Examiners to read, and rewarded positively.

In questions concerned with warfare, it is understandable that candidates will want to express personal feelings, but they should be careful to couch their viewpoints in a non-emotive manner and to try to present alternative viewpoints as a balance.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

Do small firms have a role in modern business?

Most candidates understood the intention behind this question and it was a straightforward topic, especially for students of economics. Occasionally such candidates did become rather preoccupied with economic terminology, and even more with a comparison with monopolies, which were given a disproportionate amount of space.

Examiners received some germane and thoughtful responses to this question. The role of niche markets and the personal service and flexibility of small firms were highlighted. Sadly, not many local examples were offered, nor in the larger company coverage either, which would have strengthened answers.

There was a thought frequently expressed that all small businesses want to become competitive with the multi-nationals, but once again there was no supporting evidence, even of a tentative nature.

On the whole this was a question that neither produced very low nor top scoring marks. Responses would have been more successful with greater exemplification.

Question 2

'History repeats itself.' Do you agree?

There was a considerable uptake here by candidates who wanted to write solely about the pugilistic nature of man. This was a question where candidates often referred to the war with Iraq, but their argument tended to be emotive and one-sided.

The fundamental thrust of the question was whether man himself has changed in the light of his historical experiences, and only a handful of candidates perceived this.

It had been hoped that something other than war would be considered. Even within that narrow aspect there was no examination of the cyclical versus the evolutionary, merely a diatribe against the dictators of the world, from Hitler to Bush.

Many appeared to rewrite the question and answered instead – Wars are a frequent occurrence, do you agree?

Question 3

To what extent is formal education effective?

This was a popular question.

It was one that needed definition of terminology at the outset, which was not often present, and it soon became apparent that there was confusion about what was meant by 'formal' education. Some candidates thought it was a differentiation of type of schools; some thought it meant vocational courses; some even thought that 'formal' education was that which took place in their homeland, contrasting it to 'informal' education that takes place in overseas colleges.

Almost all candidates made the link between education and the opportunity to gain employment and a future. The dangers of illiteracy are well understood.

There was some interesting criticism of too rigid a curriculum, and of inflexible teaching styles and a discussion of the idea that it is only by conformity that a society can progress. Such mature and thoughtful responses gained good content marks.

Commentary was also forthcoming from some Centres about the disparity between the education provided in rural areas compared to the urban scope.

Candidates who went on to contrast formal education with informal education, via the family, peers, media and/or general societal influences, were able to gauge the effectiveness required in the wording of the question.

For an ostensibly dry topic the range of perceptive and enlightened responses was most encouraging.

Question 4

'The only victims of war are the poor or the innocent.' Discuss.

This was a popular question and one that many candidates interpreted in a loose manner, ignoring the word 'only' and writing more about war than about the victims of war.

It also tended to elicit a very emotive and immature response, with lengthy descriptive passages, employing lurid detail, about the atrocities that we can all watch from the comfort of our homes via the television.

Certainly a definition of the poor and the innocent might have prompted a clearer focus on the topic. Too often candidates merely repeated the two terms, contrasting their plight to the rich and the leadership, all of whom would be safe and away from the action of war. This was an over-simplification.

Some, however, did amplify their responses with an examination of the effects of war on the economy, the environment and fighting troops, which was positively rewarded, as it showed a breadth of understanding and some range beyond the obvious two categories.

Exemplification was somewhat limited. The World Wars of the twentieth century did feature, but more emphasis was placed upon the recent events in Afghanistan and Iraq. This led inevitably to rhetoric, and emotive commentary, rather than clear discussion.

There were pockets of perceptive and sound analysis, however, from some Centres. An example of this was a Centre where informed discussion took place on the Maoist civil war.

The intention of the question had been to promote an argument about the effects of warfare on all society, no matter what the echelon. Emotional, economic, material and psychological damage can be caused by war, as quality of life is diminished.

Question 5

Can the use of nuclear energy be justified?

The responses to this question fell into two distinct categories. There were those that became far too involved with a reinterpretation of the question, substituting nuclear *potential* and that in terms of weaponry, for 'energy'. These candidates wrote at length about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the threat to the world of nuclear confrontation and the terrorist subversion that could ensue from the gaining of 'dirty' nuclear weapons. These essays tended to be emotive and impassioned, with only a fleeting dalliance with relevance, when they considered the issue of nuclear waste material.

By contrast there were some excellent essays that dealt with what was a clearly worded and straightforward question. There was some exploration of energy in weapon potential, perhaps through the inclusion of nuclear powered submarines at the least. The main intention, though, was an examination of power supply, in the era of fossil fuel depletion, and the attendant factors of safety, waste disposal, efficiency and costs.

Some essays were competent in their discussion of the recent history of Three Mile Island and Chernobyl, and tension between nations over the gaining of a nuclear potential that could be subverted for military use. Some candidates went further, to examine the viability of nuclear energy when compared to the greener alternatives.

Question 6

Assess the factors which affect the distribution of population in your country.

A very few candidates misread the wording of this question – some wrote ignoring the words 'your country' and wrote about global shifting populations due to migration or the brain drain; others took the question to mean population control and wrote about means of controlling, as in China. These were few but notable.

Generally, though, this was a competently answered question and appeared to appeal beyond the cohort of geography students.

Responses were well exemplified, providing information about demographic principles, features of climate, infrastructure, education and health facilities, employment opportunities, and patterns of migration with rural/urban shifts. Some candidates made reference to actual distribution within their country, naming specific areas, and there was occasionally inclusion of some other social factors, which made essays more far ranging. Examples of these factors came from religious influences and health imperatives.

Question 7

Can mathematics be made fun, interesting and worthwhile?

There were few responses to this question.

Candidates who did answer this tended to concentrate on the 'worthwhile' element at the expense of the other two concepts. Their argument could have been an answer to 'is mathematics relevant to people today?', and gave the predictable response – yes, because we all have to go shopping and be able to check the change given to us.

Candidates might have dealt with the challenge to our intellect presented by mathematics. In addition perhaps some thought could have been given to games, puzzles, mind teasers, particular mental dispositions, and numeracy being as important as literacy.

Question 8

Which should be medicine's main priority – the quality or the length of life?

Some candidates misinterpreted this question and took it to mean the shelf-life of medicine, which restricted the content of their essays.

A common weakness in the responses to this was an inability to make a decision, which is clearly required by the wording of the question. Many made a valid point that an increased quality of life does tend to lead to longevity, this was juxtaposed with the life of poverty frequently leading to premature death.

There were some solid responses that looked at the efficacy and morality of cloning and transplants, IVF and euthanasia.

Few examined the area of problems arising from a longer life, in terms of an ageing population, dependency, economic independence etc.

It was clear that no candidate saw the ethical implications of artificially prolonging life, via life support machines.

On the whole, although this was a question chosen by many, it had only limited development by most.

Question 9

Assess the value of young people's magazines today.

This was a question expected to have a wide appeal for candidates, magazines being an obvious feature of youth culture. It was disappointing that the responses that it produced, by and large, were uninspired and bland. Many of the essays were mere lists of features within a young person's magazine and there was no engagement with the potential dynamism.

Some candidates did comment on the unhealthy obsession that magazines have with celebrity status, but failed to develop any analysis of this salient observation. Even more remarkably, there were few examples offered to support the argument, though the possibilities were numerous.

A lack of exemplification was a key weakness in the majority of essays on this topic. Equally, the words 'assess' and 'value' were not addressed adequately; lists predominated, quality was not measured.

Question 10

How far should the media of any society reflect the views of its leaders?

This was a question that was rarely attempted.

Candidates could have considered the possibility that any leadership of a nation needs to have a 'voice' in order to be able to reach the maximum number of people within the society.

The media need to be independent, able to perform the function of informing and entertaining, rather than a tool controlled by the authorities. Yet the media exist in an environment that is commercially driven, therefore this could have a direct bearing on the way that they perform.

In an 'ideal' world, the media need to be free of censorship, exploitation and ownership. As we do not live in such a world, the best that can be hoped for is media impartiality, with the ability to provoke and stimulate, and to champion causes in a democratic setting.

The question focused on the freedom of media within democratic societies, or the curtailment of liberty through non-democratic societies, though other aspects would also have been worthy of discussion.

Question 11

'All works of art belong in their country of origin.' Discuss.

Again this was a question that had very few responses.

The term 'works of art' had a broad remit, it could refer to art on canvas, to statues, to sculpture, even to illustrated manuscript. It should refer to something of aesthetic value. Exemplification was going to be a prerequisite in any response to this question.

Discussion could have ensued about the rarity value, the antiquity of an artefact or a modern work of art, in terms of the cultural ownership beyond the person who created it.

This was intended as a free response type of topic or question, with an intended appeal to the artists among the candidature.

Question 12

Is the money spent on museums well spent?

There were few responses to this question. Those who did select it were able to comment on the function of a museum to be a crucial custodian of culture and history within a society, offering this function to both local and international visitor alike.

Many were able to identify the educational role that museums have today, in the context of allowing a more personal reaction to aspects of history that far surpass the written word in text books.

Only a few candidates went on to examine the more prosaic aspect of museums, the fact that they are costly – temperature control, security, staffing and maintenance of buildings – seeming not to occur to most.

Some did contemplate the alternative uses that the money spent on museums could have been put towards, but in rather idealistic terms, for example, the relief of the poor orphan and the disabled elderly person blighted by the callousness of his/her family.

Few perceived or identified the very real link between ourselves and our heritage.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FROM PAPER 8004

'Freedom of speech should be preserved at all times.' Do you agree?

This question produced a remarkably diverse range of responses.

Candidates in some regions felt that freedom of speech could be a dangerous thing. It could, in the 'wrong' hands, encourage racism and political extremism.

Others were able to highlight the impracticality of unrestricted freedom, for example in the area of slander. This led some to a consideration of freedom under the law.

Yet others wrote quite outstanding responses demonstrating an awareness and understanding of Article 10 of the European Court of Human Rights. They were then able to apply this to situations, both real and hypothetical. Freedom of speech, tempered by appropriateness to situation and location, was a popular, sincere and sensible conclusion. Such maturity of argument and awareness makes the marking of this examination a worthwhile and inspirational task. Candidates as articulate as this are rare, but their work is valued greatly.

To what extent has technology affected your country's development?

This was a popular question and well covered. Those candidates who selected it showed a depth and range of knowledge that resulted in some high marks being awarded for content.

Advances in the agricultural sphere, textile industries and infrastructure were the most common features, illustrated with local exemplification.

Candidates also addressed with maturity the differential between rates of advancement in rural as opposed to urban settings.

It was rare and pleasing to find that candidates wrote about general technological developments rather than those pertaining to their own country.

'Time watching television is time wasted.' Is this a fair comment?

This was a topic that attracted many candidates, as television is a universal facet of the modern era. Many ignored the invitation within the wording of the question to make an assessment and simply listed the features of differing types of television programming. There were pages of lists of the available channels in the country of the candidature, many examples and little attempt to evaluate.

Candidates could have offered an assessment of the purpose of television and how far that purpose was diluted by commercial companies playing to the lowest common denominator.

Few considered the alternatives to television, in terms of reading, social interaction, education, or community based activities. Many extolled the virtues of television as a means of family bonding, without looking at the removal of time spent in conversation or family activities.

Some did consider the role that censorship could play in the removal of 'unsuitable' material available to youth, especially of a violent or pornographic nature. No real conclusions about this were forthcoming.

Many fell into the trap of presenting television as a complete waste of time, only to contradict this directly in the second half of their essay by saying that television is the supreme tool for educating the masses. This was not evaluation but a facile attempt to present balance by presenting the alternative argument. Conclusions following this approach invariably were notable by their absence.