

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/01
Passages for Comment

General comments

There was an overall sense that candidates enjoyed the passages and the variety they offered. The majority of responses in the Commentary sections were again limited by recurring generalisation, but more candidates showed engagement, gave a meaningful introduction and seemed to structure their argument. Indeed, the paper appealed to candidates who made a valiant attempt to come to terms with both the content and the personal writing. There was still a tendency for some candidates to adopt a feature spotting approach, looking for issues such as punctuation and paragraphing at the expense of more engaged exploration. However, the range of material seemed to encourage candidates to experiment with their creative writing responses so that even those who appeared less secure in analysing the language and style of particular passages could find some reward in the directed writing tasks. Some candidates seemed to mix and match answers by covering two commentaries first and then attempting the directed tasks afterwards. A few answered **Question 2** out of sequence and thus were not able to compare their continuation of the original material with the extract. In general, time management was sound and rubric infringements were limited.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Question 1

- (a) This proved to be a popular choice and provided a clear range of differentiated responses. It was generally answered well where candidates noted changes in style and tone. Some candidates became a little too entangled in the paragraph referring to Princess Diana. Able candidates grasped how Victoria Beckham manipulates readers round to her way of thinking and that her comments in paragraph two do not just show her compassion for Geri but reveal Geri's inadequacies. Such responses saw the progression through the passage through her first person singular pronoun use and spiteful comments moving on to the use of 'us' to gain sympathy for herself and the group after Geri's exit. However, as in some other Commentary sections, phrases were pointed out by some candidates but their role in conveying meaning was not grasped. Such answers relied on a tendency to describe content rather than analyse language. Many commented, though, with a degree of success, on the conversational aspects of the passage and the attitudes increasingly revealed.
- (b) In this section many were able to replicate the casual use of language to good effect. A number of candidates recognised the need to criticise as per the instructions and captured the tone and language of the original well. However, a few candidates were rather too polite or made the error of writing about Ginger Spice again. The most effective answers skilfully wove together the apparent compliments and sympathy with a flash of venom and cutting edge remarks. There was, in general, an effective sense of audience and purpose with some imaginative incorporation of 'teen-speak' vocabulary. Less secure answers tended to miss the style and invective of the original passage.

Question 2

- (a) The most imaginative and creative responses here maintained the suspense and gothic mood, got into the mind of the character and gave a sense of the oppressiveness of the surroundings. There were some very entertaining continuations of the original passage with an appropriate sense of genre and style. However, less informed candidates easily became confused over details and even developed descriptions of the piano rather than the organ. A few decided the original was not scary enough and added large amounts of gory detail in their own pieces; in such cases, the tenor of the original material was transposed ineffectively into horror story mode. At the lower end of the

mark range some candidates seemed able to recognise figures of speech but were less successful at explaining how they worked within the passage.

- (b) In 2(b) when the imagery was grasped (images of death in the 'shrouded figures; desolation' beginning in the setting in 'deserted streets'; 'echoed'; the sense of the sinister and a threat 'lurking'; and the 'gurgling mutter' of the river) there were perceptive and informed ideas on show, better responses saw the gradual progression of the passage. For the main part, the analysis of the passage was generally reasonable or above. However, at the lower end of the mark range comments were still general; often a reason for a particular device was "it creates mystery in the reader" or "...makes the reader aware of the intended atmosphere". Such comments needed to be developed in closer detail or the qualities evoked by the words/phrases explored in more depth. Some candidates did not read the rubric fully and commented only on the original passage rather than their own creative writing as well. However, those who did produced highly analytical, comparative pieces of appreciation, demonstrating a very good command of appropriate critical terminology and thorough understanding of genre.

Question 3

- (a) This was a popular question also and only less secure candidates failed to comment on the contrasting comments, the humour/irony and the casual style. Fewer commented on the use of categorisation and headings for a clearer read and ease of accessing information by potential holiday-makers. Many, however, seemed to feel that this was an advertisement to persuade readers to go rather than the more balanced view of a guide. However, a large number clearly saw the function of the piece and the tone of voice and responded with some insightful and focused comments.
- (b) Less successful answers only managed to construct some tables and a few lines of continuous prose. Yet, better responses captured the humorous negativity and casual style of the original with a strong degree of creativity and flair. Such answers also understood the critical nature of the report, its use of parentheses and seemingly throw away comments whilst refraining from outright condemnation of the subject under review. It was interesting that many assumed that something sprawling, glitzy, chrome-covered and pink-themed was the height of good fashion!

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Paper 8693/02

Composition

General comments

As usual in this component, there were some very imaginative and highly creative responses underpinned by an awareness of purpose, audience and genre. Such responses contained vocabulary of a high standard; many candidates seemed to enjoy writing compositions and their interests and energy were markedly engaged. There was clear evidence of excellent preparation. However, some candidates' marks were limited by matters of technical inaccuracy (especially confusion of tenses and subject/verb agreement) or by the continued failure of some to address the clear rubric requirement of the length of answers (between 600 to 900 words), a self-penalising process. It is worth noting that a degree of fluency commensurate with AS standards is a prerequisite for this component and this needs to be borne in mind. Most candidates seemed to divide their time well. It was noticeable that a few candidates felt it was appropriate to use swear words in their compositions, often in the discursive writing section where there seems to be little justification for any such use. On the whole, though, Examiners commented that they enjoyed the responses they saw and found the cultural insights they gained rewarding and intriguing.

COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

Section A

- 1 Effective answer allowed an initial stimulus to develop into an interesting and engaging evocation of memories and feelings, with a real sense of structure and purpose. Some candidates, though, were inspired by an initial idea but had not considered fully how to develop it. Candidates, in such cases, need to ensure they read the question fully and use some of their time for effective planning. Less secure answers tended to focus purely on lyrics sometimes even failing to name the song or piece of music and wrote in such a generalized way that they avoided the central aspects of the title.
- 2 This was a popular choice of question. There were some very touching insights and successful answers forged apt connections between the viewpoints, although this was not a requirement in the question. Such answers were also fluent and choices of details evoked feelings and lifestyles with creative flair. There were some areas where some candidates could have been more watchful: a casual diary format, punctuation and an over colloquial style (it is noticeable that some candidates feel that representing the first person singular with a lower case 'I' is acceptable these days). One Examiner felt that on some occasions the material was a little predictable in less secure answers: that there was, at times, a tendency towards sentimentality or cliché with the wealthy person being miserable and the poor person ecstatically happy.
- 3 This, too, was popular and generally well covered, especially when clearly based on personal experience. Often, very effective contrasts were developed. There was, at best, some powerful and evocative descriptive writing. Less secure responses tended to be a bit over ambitious and produced some streams of incomplete or broken sentences in a rather over-written style so that florid expression stood out.
- 4 Where candidates managed to blend all the elements together there was some highly skilful writing with a surreal blend of colours. Successful answers also addressed the requirement that the pieces were also meant to form the opening to a story and created mystery and intrigue. Others also rooted the composition in a believable situation and avoided any excessive elements. Answers lower down the range tended to be over ambitious here too, self-consciously striving for effects with inappropriate imagery and attempted lyricism. They also tended to string together rather random images with little sense of planning or purpose.

Section B

- 5 Most candidates were skilled in addressing and sustaining an imagined audience. They possessed thoughtful familiarity with and concern for their localities, often bringing in an understanding of environmental issues and matters of tourism effectively. Examiners noted that there was more evidence of sound teaching on how to structure a discursive essay here.
- 6 This was a popular choice and interesting to read. It was rather heartening to see how many young people crave peace, social harmony and justice for their countries. The majority of essays were structured well and justified their ideas clearly. Many wrote with sincerity about their own countries' problems. There was evidence here of detailed planning with a clear focus on laws and the nature of society. Less secure answers waxed lyrical about democracy and entry restrictions but did not really expand or explore issues beyond rather generalized ones.
- 7 Strong answers usually drew on knowledge of specific examples and there were some interesting responses from some who saw charity concerts as a focus for all forms of wickedness but cases were clearly argued and engaging for the candidates because notions of celebrity are so international. Opinions were very persuasive and there were some very original ideas on display. Less effective responses tended to describe lists of superstars or rock stars who were role models.
- 8 Good answers supported reasonably polite criticism with structured lines of argument. Less successful answers adopted the pop jargon of radio programmes to create diatribes of vitriol which were entertaining in their real venom but had little in the way of reasoned argument. Sometimes, if one work of art was covered adequately, the other was cursorily dismissed. Some candidates could not identify by name the pieces of work they had chosen.