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# **GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCSE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

**NOVEMBER 2017**

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## ENGLISH LANGUAGE

### GCSE

November 2017

### UNIT 1

The second submission of work for this unit used the same tasks as those from the summer with the generic topics for the Individual Researched Presentations and the same topics: 'Graffiti – art or vandalism?', 'Votes for 16 year-olds. What do you think?' and 'Tourism – the new growth industry for Wales?' for the Group Discussion.

#### Administration

Pleasingly, there were fewer problems with recordings although a considerable number of centres failed to provide recordings on time which posed real problems for the moderators as the time frame was very limited. There was an increase in the number of centres that provided their record sheets in digital form or printed out with a printed teacher name. This is not acceptable as these forms must be signed by teachers to validate the submission. A printed name is not sufficient.

Incomplete recordings, where a candidate has not undertaken both tasks, should be replaced with complete candidates' work.

More centres provided recordings on USB devices which were straightforward to access. In many cases candidates were very clearly identified at the beginning of their recording with either the candidate or a teacher giving the date of the recording, the centre number and name, the candidate's full name and examination number, the theme and topic of the presentation, and the chosen task for the group discussion.

Some centres had group discussions comprising four to six candidates, which made moderation challenging where only audio was submitted. Large groupings of candidates can also impact on the opportunity to demonstrate skills within a recommended time limit.

Timings for the tasks were generally appropriate, though there were still instances of brevity in both tasks. There were fewer instances of tasks going significantly beyond the time frames required.

There were still instances where the provision of notes and prompts were of concern. Some of the notes were far too detailed and amounted to scripts and, particularly, notes appeared to have been used but not sent to the moderator. This applied mostly to audio recordings where it was clear that pages or cards were being turned. There were also still instances where group discussions were heavily prepared and scripted. Once again may I remind centres that, for the Individual Researched Presentation, the specification states, "It is not permissible for the presentation to be scripted. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task, but rather an oral presentation prepared by the candidate." For Group Discussions, it is also clearly stated that: "No scripting of the discussion is allowed – it should be a natural discussion. It must be emphasised that this is not a reading task."

In general the record sheets were detailed and used a combination of criteria related comments and task/candidate specific comments. The best cited examples of some of the vocabulary used and, for the group discussions which were audio recordings, often gave the opening words of the candidate which was very helpful.

## **Task setting**

### **Individual Researched Presentations**

There were fewer instances of candidates being expected to use the same theme throughout the centre, but this did still arise, as did using the same topic for both tasks. This was highlighted in the previous report as being inadvisable and the same advice is given again. There were also examples of candidates repeating the same task or topic as had been used in the summer submission. This is not acceptable as it is clear that if candidates produce new work it should be different from the previous tasks. Both tasks must be replaced: it is not possible to replace just one task.

The full range of topics was used, with 'Leisure' probably being the most popular. Those who tried to persuade their audience of the attractions of a hobby or sport tended to achieve more than those who simply presented information.

'The World of Science/Technology' also proved popular with many candidates dealing with the impact of technology on their lives.

'The World of Work' again proved interesting to candidates with some speaking about their ambitions and others dealing with the benefits of work experience or their disappointment that it had been discontinued in their area.

'Citizenship' was again less popular but clearly engaged some candidates in topics as diverse as considering re-introducing the death penalty, contrasting citizens' rights in India and Wales and terrorism.

There were, again, examples of presentations which clearly evoked strong interest from the candidate but which were difficult to place in a category. These included a talk on the benefits of travel and an exploration of the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle.

As has already been mentioned, the use – and overuse – of notes and cue cards is an area which must be addressed both in terms of promoting good practice and also reflected in marks awarded.

### **Responding and Interacting (Group Discussion)**

It was pleasing to note that in many more of the group discussions the group sizes were limited to three candidates, and were mixed rather than single sex groups. There were more centres which provided audio-visual recordings for this task which made identification of the participants very straightforward. However, there were still examples of discussions which had clearly been rehearsed and sometimes read as polite exchanges. Where groups were able to interact more freely, genuine exchanges of views were apparent. There appeared to be more occasions when teachers intervened – sometimes after a very short initial exchange – to promote more discussion. This clearly can be helpful to lower attaining or less confident candidates, but again should be reflected in marks awarded.

Disappointingly, there were still examples of groups of five or even six candidates in a group. These often struggled to engage and none of the candidates were able to really contribute significantly. It is clear in the guidance that candidates are expected to be 'in groups of three or four'.

There were, again, examples of candidates being asked to adopt a role and being over-prepared with information provided by the centre. However, there were also some examples of lively and engaged discussion which ranged both over and beyond the stimulus materials provided.

All three topics were used with perhaps more candidates looking at 'Tourism – the new growth industry for Wales?' than in the previous series. This often made use of local knowledge as well as the wider view of Wales as a whole. It was also good to hear that candidates used their own areas when considering 'Graffiti – art or vandalism?', highlighting examples of artists and their work from Cardiff and other towns and cities in Wales as well as citing examples from other areas of the United Kingdom and beyond. The issue of 'Voting for 16 year-olds. What do you think?' was again popular and created some lively debate.

This area is still one where candidates need practice in interacting with each other and learning how to sustain an argument.

### **Assessment**

Overall the assessments were generally sound and there was clearly some attempt to moderate the recordings before marks were submitted. Where there were discrepancies these arose because marks did not always reflect brevity of performances or reading of scripts. Audio-visual recordings were transparent and generally much more accurately assessed. Audio recordings did not always recognise the reading of material in the marks awarded.

Candidates who gave an Individual Researched Presentation lasting under two minutes and then answered one or two straightforward questions were unlikely to achieve marks above the lower end of Band 3 at best. Similarly, a member of a Group Discussion who only made two or three brief contributions – often as a result of there being too many people in the group as well as a brief discussion – cannot move beyond Band 2 marks. In these instances, marks were often very generously awarded. Candidates who did little more than provide information on a topic were also often generously rewarded when there was little or no evidence of evaluation or analysis, skills required for Band 3 and above.

Allowing candidates to select topics of personal interest and encouraging good practice in terms of use of brief notes for the Individual Researched Presentation is still an area for improvement. For the Group Discussion, candidates need to practise the art of arguing and discussing with each other in order to develop this essential life skill.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

November 2017

### UNIT 2

#### Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 2 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. For this examination, candidates were provided with five different reading texts based on the theme of Baking. This was a re-sit opportunity and only those candidates who had been entered for the examination in June were eligible for entry along with post-16 candidates who had not been entered for the qualification previously. Despite this, a wide range of achievement was in evidence.

There was a range of question types, and the texts provided included continuous and non-continuous writing. The texts centred around the activity of baking and its wider effects, particularly in relation to its potentially beneficial impact upon mental health.

The theme appeared to have been of interest to candidates and there was plenty of evidence of commitment and hard work across the examination. The majority of candidates appeared to have allowed sufficient time for the completion of this paper. As with all examinations, there were a few who used the examination session less effectively, perhaps dividing their time disproportionately across the paper or who were unwilling to apply themselves to materials presented. Thankfully, these cases were few and far between.

#### Reading

##### **A1. What percentage of British people are said to have baked this year?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This was a straightforward location question intended to enable candidates to immediately engage with the theme of the examination. The majority of candidates were able to answer this successfully – the answer ‘around 85% of Britons’ was easily located at the beginning of the text. It was sufficient to copy the phrase directly from the text. Text A was a non-continuous text and most proved able to isolate the relevant information. Overall, this question appeared to allow the vast majority of candidates to engage with the text and the question.

##### **A2. What were 24% of people said to have baked ‘from scratch’ in the last 12 months?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This was presented as a multiple-choice question. It proved reasonably straightforward for candidates although credible distractors were included in the answers available for selection. It was essential that candidates looked carefully at the information presented in the text which clearly led them to select standard cakes (the fifth option), as the correct answer. As with all of the multiple-choice questions, some candidates took a curious approach to the presentation of their answer. Those who ticked multiple boxes or who did not make sure their selected answer remained clear after making amendments were not able to acquire any marks. In one or two cases, candidates opted to write an alternative answer to those available for selection and, again, these were not eligible for credit.

**A3. (a) What is the second most popular reason that people give for baking?  
(b) What percentage of men give this reason for baking?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to analyse information.*

To answer this question successfully candidates needed to demonstrate clear understanding of the information presented. It was necessary to answer the first part of the question (part a) correctly in order for a candidate to answer the second part of the question (part b). The second most popular reason provided for baking was ‘to treat the family’ and this proved no barrier to the vast majority of candidates. Candidates were not required to quote this information directly, although that appeared the most straightforward route to take, and examiners were instructed to allow for any approach in which understanding was made clear. It was a short step once the reason had been identified to decode the statistics using the key provided and most candidates were also able to provide the required percentage of men who baked to ‘treat the family’.

**A4. The article refers to ‘any preconception that people may have had that baking is for girls’. What does the word ‘preconception’ mean?**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning.*

This question considered Text B. It was presented as a multiple-choice question and it was essential that candidates looked carefully at the word ‘preconception’ in the context of the text. A wider awareness of vocabulary and the role of prefixes was undoubtedly helpful here too. Whilst the majority of candidates answered this question correctly, there were still quite a number who did not. The most significant number of incorrect responses selected the fourth option ‘a judgement to be made’ which perhaps suggests that some candidates had limited awareness of the ‘pre-’ prefix.

**A5. Explain why the writer thinks that baking is “officially cool”.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning and ideas.*

Successful answers to this question were able to explain that baking is seen as “officially cool” because of the trend for young people to be those who bake most often. There was a requirement that candidates be able to interpret the quotation from the text and demonstrate their understanding through brief explanation. Those who copied the quote ‘the most regular bakers are those aged 16-34’ were not considered to have demonstrated the necessary understanding of what they had read. There were many approaches taken to this question and some candidates perhaps wrote far more than was necessary in order to get to the correct answer (some even creating additional lines to write upon). The best answers were clear and succinct with some candidates well able to highlight that the text was referring to a younger demographic. It was also clear that some candidates struggled to interpret the text and were therefore unable to offer a valid explanation.

**A6. Write down the two ‘biggest barriers’ for those who needed a ‘bit more encouragement to put an apron on’.**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This proved to be a very straightforward question and the majority of candidates were able to locate the relevant information and answer this question successfully. Text B was a continuous text and two details were needed here to receive one mark but as both details could be located together this did not seem to be too challenging. Overall, this question appeared to allow candidates across the cohort to engage with the text and the question with few barriers to understanding.

**A7. What are the two aims of the Depressed Cake Shop?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This question was the first on Text C. To successfully answer this question, candidates needed to ensure that they had read the whole text, including the introductory paragraph. Again, this was a straightforward question with information retrieval the skill that was being tested. The majority of candidates were able to locate and separate the two distinct aims of the Depressed Cake Shop: to get people talking about mental health, and to raise money for mental health charities. A more implicit aim was that the Depressed Cake Shop organisation sought to open shops and this was also a valid answer. The majority of candidates achieved on this question and the only barriers to success were apparent when candidates' responses were too brief or vague (e.g. providing answers such as 'get people talking' or 'raise money') or when they overlooked the first paragraph in favour of making statements which appeared to be influenced by other aspects of the text that did not answer the question. For example, stating that the aim is to 'bring out a cookbook' or to 'make people proud'.

**A8. Explain how baking can help to improve people's mental health.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information in more challenging writing and to refer to evidence within texts.*

This question required candidates to engage with the evidence they had selected and explain how it answered the question. There were a number of reasons available from the passage with some able to be explained in slightly different but equally valid ways. Although some reasons had natural points of overlap many candidates proved well able, after some thorough evidence selection, to pinpoint and explore some of the different ways that baking could improve people's mental health. Many candidates wrote at length here and tried to cover significant ground in their answers. Less successful answers tended to dwell on one or two areas, perhaps becoming a little repetitive in their approach – too long spent focusing on baking as a 'therapeutic' process was perhaps the most common occurrence. Brevity in approach and/or the spotting of key points with little explanation were self-limiting here as candidates failed to address the criteria required for marks in the higher bands. A rarer occurrence perhaps came from those who failed to address the text in these answers and based their response on a wider awareness of the topic. Although this happened infrequently, a few candidates took this approach and it did not prove helpful in an assessment of their reading skills.

**A9. What does John Whaite mean when he says he is “not a perpetually perky person”?**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning and ideas.*

This was the first question on Text D. To successfully answer this question, candidates were required to engage with both 'perpetually' and 'perky' to arrive at the conclusion that he is a person who is not always happy or cheerful and/or that he can be moody. Most candidates attempted this question and there were reasonable levels of success. Candidates who were too fixed in their ideas – for example, those who suggested that he is not a happy person or perhaps that his moods are always bad – were unlikely to be successful.

**A10. What is meant when Whaite refers to baking as “a form of artistic expression”?**

*This question tests the ability to use verbal reasoning skills, inference and deduction skills.*

This was the third multiple choice question on Unit 2. Again, and as evidenced by the success rates, this proved reasonably straightforward for candidates although there were credible distractors included in the answers available for selection. As with previous questions, it was essential that candidates looked carefully at what the question was asking rather than just choosing answers that they felt to be true. Some of the distractors, for example, did use information which could be found in the text (for example, it was true to say that John Whaite confesses to baking ‘instead of drawing and painting’). As with the summer, it was clear that candidates had been taught to reflect on their choice and make changes if necessary. Again, this suggested that candidates had been well-prepared for the challenges of verbal reasoning.

**A11. This text is about a journalist who writes about baking. What magazine does she write for?**

*This question tests the ability to retrieve information.*

Candidates focused on Text E to answer this question. This proved a very straightforward task with the vast majority able to correctly identify ‘Home Magazine’ from the end of the second paragraph. There were only two incorrect alternatives that appeared to any great degree – the first being ‘The Art of Blind Baking’ which was the name of the text from which the extract was taken, and ‘readers of *Home Magazine*’ which suggested that candidates had copied indiscriminately from the text without clearly understanding the name of the magazine.

**A12. How does the writer convey the care that has gone into the creation of the gingerbread house?**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning, ideas and information in challenging writing and to refer to evidence within texts.*

As expected, this proved a more challenging question although those candidates who kept the question firmly in mind will have experienced some success. The question required candidates to retain a clear focus on the care that was taken in the construction of the gingerbread house. There was a wealth of different examples within the text which many candidates proved able to isolate and examine. Candidates who worked through the text chronologically often produced the most coherent and developed responses. The very best answers responded to the nuances of the writer’s language and vocabulary and examined the evidence in their selected answers in some detail. Those who undertook a relentless search for different techniques and devices without being guided by the question and text were unlikely to achieve highly. At times examiners felt that the appearance of the word ‘how’ in a question seems to encourage a few candidates to apply blinkers and neglect the meanings that can be gleaned from text and question in a bid to scan the text for specific examples of techniques such as alliteration or emotive language. Whilst there may well be valid comments to make about such matters they should always go hand-in-hand with a clear focus on the question and thorough examination of the meaning which is created through the text. Finally, quite a number of candidates presented their answers as a series of phrases or a list of evidence selections with no link to the task – this was an unhelpful approach and difficult to credit.

**A13. Using information from Text D and Text E, synthesise the reasons why people bake.**

*This question tests the ability to synthesise information effectively from more than one text.*

Overall, the attempt rates for this question, particularly given its location towards the end of the Reading section, and the progress that some were able to make here, was reassuring. As with this question in the summer series, the majority of candidates attempted this question and were able to draw information from both texts in order to do so. Some were able to present valid reasons why people bake succinctly and with little direct reference to the text, but once again the vast majority appeared more comfortable in organising their answers around quoted examples that they had selected from the individual texts. Once again, it is important to stress that either approach was valid. There is no requirement for candidates to cite the text of their focus, but again many appeared do this in order to aid the organisation of their answer and clarify their thoughts.

From Text D, there were numerous reasons presented by John Whaite to explain why he bakes and there were few candidates who did not manage to identify some of these. Many made considerable headway here and were able to put together a coherent examination of his reasons for baking. Text E, as expected, proved a little less straightforward as the reasons presented were less explicit and required careful reading of implied meaning. Effort levels were high though, and candidates were certainly willing to address this text and make some headway here.

This was the highest tariff question on Section A and was the only question to require an examination of more than one text. This and the space provided for an answer should have indicated to candidates that some time needed to be spent providing a full answer to this question. Very brief answers with little range in the points presented will have been self-penalising.

Finally, as with the summer, those candidates who attempted to offer comparative points in answer to this question often wasted valuable time and sometimes led themselves away from the point of the question. Clearly marks were not deducted for such an approach but candidates may have restricted themselves as a result of the direction of their piece.

**Editing**

**A14. Stacey was determined to reach home \_\_\_(a)\_\_\_delay. It was \_\_\_(b)\_\_\_ that she saw John before he left for work.**

(a) **Circle** the word below that best fits gap (a):

beyond / achieving / saving / without

(b) **Circle** the word below that best fits gap (b):

quickly / obligatory / vital / unimportant

*This question tests the ability to understand texts at word level.*

This question tested a candidate's ability to work out which words were the best fit in the context of the sentence presented. Although more than one of the words may have been grammatically correct, the skill in editing was shown through selecting the answer which was the best fit and made the most sense.

Again, the success rates for this question (with over 97% of candidates selecting the correct answer for the first part of the question) suggested that many of the candidates were well equipped to answer. Barriers to success may have come from the candidates' presentation of their answers. Although the instruction was clearly to **circle** the words to be chosen, where the answer was made clear (for example, through underlining, highlighting or putting ticks next to the correct selection) credit was given. Candidates who made the correct selection and presented it any other format were also given credit. Difficulties again arose when, for whatever reason, candidates did not make it clear which of the answers they had chosen.

**A15. Tick the box of the sentence you think is grammatically correct.**

If a customer wishes to receive a full refund, he or she must have a receipt.

If customers wishes to receive a full refund, they must have a receipt.

If a customer wished to receive a full refund, he or she must have a receipt.

If customers wished to receive a full refund, they must have a receipt.

*This question tests the ability to understand texts at sentence level.*

For the majority of candidates, success rates were high for this question and a large proportion of the candidates selected the correct answer. The discriminators did prove something of a challenge for some candidates though and all of the discriminators received some proportion of selection

**A16. Read the text below which consists of sentences in the wrong order then answer the questions that follow:**

1. After a frantic dash to the car, the butter was discovered beneath the driver's seat.
2. Firstly, he took the eggs and flour from his bag and put them on the worktop.
3. Harry began to assemble the ingredients he would need to make James a birthday cake.
4. He panicked when discovering that the final ingredient was missing.
5. After searching the cupboard, he was then able to add sugar and baking powder.

(a) Which sentence should come **third** in the text?

(b) Which sentence should come **fifth** in the text?

*This question tests the ability to understand texts at text level.*

As with the summer examination, to answer this question successfully, candidates needed to work out the order for all of the sentences in order to see which sentence best fit into the required location. This again proved a challenging question, although the majority of candidates were able to determine at least one of these answers.

The correct sequence of sentences was as follows:

1. Harry began to assemble the ingredients he would need to make James a birthday cake.
2. Firstly, he took the eggs and flour from his bag and put them on the worktop.
3. After searching the cupboard, he was then able to add sugar and baking powder.
4. He panicked when discovering that the final ingredient was missing.
5. After a frantic dash to the car, the butter was discovered beneath the driver's seat.

## Proof Reading

**B1.** In this question, candidates were asked to read a recipe for flapjacks. They were asked to circle five errors and write the corrections in the spaces provided.

*This task tested a candidate's ability to write accurately.*

The majority of candidates were able to make some progress with this question and many identified and corrected all of the errors accurately. 'Sausepan' was perhaps the most missed error and even when it was identified it was not always accurately corrected. Candidates put forward some quite varied forms of spelling this word, seeming at times to perhaps combine the English and Welsh spellings. It was also not uncommon to see candidates write down a list of potential spellings for 'saucepan', perhaps to try to work out which one looked 'most right'. 'Roled' was also one of the more commonly missed errors, perhaps as a result of it appearing within the list of ingredients at the start of the recipe. It may be worth reiterating to candidates the necessity of carefully reading the whole of the text they are provided with.

Some candidates chose to rewrite the instructions, offered alternative vocabulary and disputed the method presented for making flapjacks. It is worth reinforcing that this task is designed to assess written accuracy and does not seek to elicit subjective alternatives to the content presented.

## Writing

**B2.** Candidates were given the choice of which task to complete for this question. They were able to choose between:

- (a) **Describe an occasion when you did something you found rewarding.**
- (b) **Famous chefs such as Jamie Oliver and Mary Berry have spoken of the need for better food and better education about food in schools. Write an essay to explain your views on this subject, giving clear reasons and examples.**

Candidates needed to select one of these tasks and produce a piece of writing of between 350-500 words. The topic area for both was linked loosely to the content of the reading texts in Section A.

### Task A

To complete this task, candidates needed to describe a time they had been involved in something they found rewarding. There was scope to provide an engagingly detailed description of a situation or event that had proved satisfying or worthwhile. As we perhaps should have anticipated, there was quite a range of activities that candidates considered to be 'rewarding' and whilst some opted for descriptions of altruistic endeavour these were perhaps outnumbered by the tales of individual success and/or financial reward that many elected to describe. It was very pleasing, nonetheless, to read some of the many different ways in which candidates contribute to their families and their communities. There were numerous tales of unsung heroes and good deeds to help the needy. Indeed, one candidate's endearing tale of helping her parents in their bid to offer foster care to vulnerable children will live long in the memory.

## Task B

As with the summer, Task B was an exposition task. To complete this task, candidates were required to write an essay which explained the need for better food and better education about food in schools. This produced some detailed and well-informed writing. Generally, candidates were able to organise their work appropriately and develop some of their ideas in pleasing detail. In particular, there were some very interesting and mature observations in relation to the state of food education in school and how this relates to the information that is widely available outside of school. Some candidates were able to discuss food education as a real positive, suggesting the world-at-large (and parents, in particular) could benefit from similar information whereas others focused on the relative paucity of available information, whilst clearly demonstrating what could be done. However, there were also notable areas where candidates struggled and examiners reported that some candidates found difficulty in balancing the necessary development of detail for both areas of this task – generally favouring a discussion of the provision of food in school over the additional consideration of food education.

Overall, there were many pleasing attempts at both question types here and many candidates proved able to write in sufficient detail. In both tasks, there was a pleasing attention to the purpose of the task in question and writing was generally sequenced and audience aware. As with the summer examination, timing did not appear to have been problematic for the vast majority of candidates and some detailed written work was produced. As ever, there were examples of work which were very brief or incomplete and some candidates will have struggled to progress through the assessment bands as a result. Those candidates who were ‘off task’, whether as a result of confusion, or perhaps through an ill-advised attempt to reproduce a previously prepared piece which did not appear to fit the requirements of the task, will also have struggled to make much progress.

As was evidenced by the reports of both Principal Examiners in the summer, and indeed as has been mentioned during every CPD session delivered by WJEC English Language in Wales Team over the past few months, written accuracy remains an area of significant concern. It has been evident through discussions with teachers during CPD sessions and elsewhere that this is an area which is equally of concern to the vast majority of English teachers today. Again, it was evident that those candidates who made significant numbers of errors and thus compromised the coherence of their writing, struggled to score highly.

# ENGLISH LANGUAGE

## GCSE

November 2017

### UNIT 3

#### Overview

A breakdown of the Unit 3 examination on a question-by-question basis is provided below. Candidates were presented with five different reading texts all of which were based on the theme of 'Sleep'. This was a re-sit opportunity and only those candidates who had been entered for the examination in June were eligible for entry along with post-16 candidates who had not been entered for the qualification previously.

Throughout the paper, there were no unexpected question types that had not been seen in the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs) or during the summer series. A balance of continuous and non-continuous texts, with a combination of text and illustrations were included for study. The texts provided readers with some differing views about sleep and the side effects that can be caused when a person does not manage to get enough of it. The topic was closely linked to the use of technology and many candidates seemed to support the view of Text E that poor performance and a lack of sleep/overuse of technology are intrinsically linked.

Although this was a re-sit opportunity, we encountered the full range of ability levels throughout the process. While some candidates were clearly re-sitting the examination as they had not gained a C grade in August, it was clear that others were taking this examination to improve an already competent grade.

#### Reading

##### TEXT A

##### **A1. For how many hours a day should a pre-school child sleep?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

Text A was a straightforward non-continuous text comprising of some text and statistical information. The text was relatively straightforward and it was helpfully organised to enable candidates to locate the information they needed both quickly and efficiently. To answer this question, candidates simply had to locate a number. It was perfectly acceptable for candidates to simply write down a number to answer the question. The vast majority of candidates got this question correct and although they presented their information in different ways (for example writing out the numbers in words or figures), all correct answers were credited.

There was a tendency for some to write out a sentence with the correct number contained within it. This is unnecessary. If candidates are asked for a number, detail or percentage, they will be rewarded fully for the number/word alone. This should save some candidates a little time. There were very few examples of candidates transferring the number incorrectly from the text onto their answer paper.

**A2. How many deaths are caused in the United Kingdom each year due to people falling asleep while driving?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This question, relating to information in Text A, was also straightforward. Candidates were asked to locate the number of deaths caused by falling asleep while driving. This piece of information was located in a sentence which provided information about the number of crashes (4000) and the number of deaths (300). Very occasionally a candidate became confused and wrote down that there were 4000 deaths. In the text the 300 was preceded with 'at least' and although candidates who included this were credited we felt that it was perfectly acceptable to award 300 alone. Candidates did not struggle with this question and we found very few incorrect answers throughout the entire cohort.

**A3. Which of the following definitions best describes the phrase, 'chronic sleep debt'?**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning.*

The final question based on Text A asked candidates to deduce the 'best' meaning of the phrase 'chronic sleep debt'. This was a multiple-choice question and candidates were given four possible answers from which they had to select one response. This phrase came in the first 'cloud' and was one of the side effects of sleep deficiency. If candidates had read the sub-title before this section of text, they would have helped themselves enormously. The first answer 'when a serious amount of sleep has been missed' was the correct answer. Most candidates tried to determine the meaning of this phrase, in context, and often found that they were able to eliminate all of the credible distractors. The success rate for this question was approximately 70% which suggests that many candidates found this to be an accessible question.

**A4. Tick the box that best describes the purpose of this text.**

*This question tests the ability to understand and recognise the purpose of texts.*

The introduction to Text B read 'Text B appeared in a Biology textbook' and given the success rate of this question (approximately 85%) it is arguable that many read this introduction and were helped by it. It is not always possible to include an introduction as precise as this one which gave some indication of the purpose of the text, but, it should act as a reminder to candidates to always read any information that is given to describe the text as this is designed to aid them. Purpose of text is a tricky question (although only worth one mark), as candidates have to apply their understanding of the PISA definitions to a specific text and then deduce which is the most likely purpose. This question, however, does not seem to have posed many problems. Some candidates chose to tick multiple boxes and these responses were not credited.

**A5. During which type of sleep is there no eye movement or muscle activity?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This proved to be a straightforward question for those who located the information in the text and then wrote down the type of sleep it referred to. Some candidates tried to overthink this question and attempted to answer question 6 (about the stages of sleep) before answering question 5, which was not a helpful approach. Those who located the correct section and wrote down 'deep sleep' were awarded a mark as this is a type of sleep. Those who tried to deduce the stage of sleep that this description refers to (usually writing down stage 3 or stage 4) were not credited. A numerical answer is not a type of sleep, it is a stage of sleep.

**A6. Text B describes the different stages of a regular sleep cycle. Put these stages into order by numbering each of the stages below from each section.**

*This question tests the ability to demonstrate verbal reasoning skills in synthesising information.*

To answer this sequence question successfully, candidates had to determine the most likely order of the stages of sleep. Stage 2 was the trickiest stage to determine due to the vague nature of the description and this was why it was given to candidates as an example. With the three remaining possible answers, the first one (d) included the phrase 'drifting off to sleep' and the 'drifting' should have been sufficient for most to determine that this is the first stage of sleep as they are only just falling asleep. With the two remaining stages the description of the fourth stage which mentioned the 'latter stage of sleep' should have helped candidates to deduce that this would refer to the fourth or last stage. While the majority worked through and tried to deduce the correct order, others were careless in their application of numbers (for example numbering their responses 1-3, or 2-5, rather than 1,3,4).

The same messages apply as those that were included in the report based on the June examination. Some candidates used the same number on more than one occasion and this also made it difficult to credit their answers. Some candidates who used a word processor for the majority of their other questions, chose to hand write this answer in the answer booklet and this was a decision that ensured their answer was presented clearly. However, others tried to sequence the information on their own computers and then present it using different numbers/letters to the original text often became very confused and struggled to gain reward.

It is worth reinforcing the message that all candidates who choose to complete any rough work to help them answer this question, should do so in the space below the question or in the text booklet. Several candidates tried to work out the sequence in their answer space, made several errors and crossings out, and then struggled to communicate their final answers clearly.

**A7. Explain how irregular sleep patterns can affect teenagers in school.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing and understand and recognise the reliability of texts.*

Text C was taken from a webpage about sleep for teenagers. To answer this question, candidates were required to explain how irregular sleep can affect teenagers in school. As with all 'explain' type questions, it is imperative that candidates begin by looking for relevant supporting evidence from the text and then use this as the basis for answering the question. Some candidates were able to locate details from the text but then failed to link these in any way to the question posed. Candidates were asked to consider the effect of these irregular sleeping patterns in school and those who performed best selected an example from the text (for example, the point about appearance) and then tried to link this to how it may cause problems at school (for example, linking appearance to self-esteem and bullying etc.). Those who systematically tracked through the text and separated the evidence into a series of credible points, which they then explained, usually scored between 3-5 marks. Some of the points were relatively self-explanatory, for example the point about 'limiting their ability to learn' and damaging 'their marks in school'. Others required a little more explanation to ensure that they actually answered the question.

There are a small minority who choose to simply copy out sections of text for the longer questions and this approach is to be avoided. It is usually impossible to award more than one or two marks to candidates who rely on copying and those who copy unselectively may find that they are awarded no marks.

Some of the points in the mark scheme can be found in small dense sections of text. In such instances, candidates must disentangle the information and make distinctly different points about each, to gain reward. As with all other questions, those who included lengthy or unselective quotations did not usually achieve high marks.

**A8. Explain what is meant by the phrase, “treatable sleep disorder”.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

Word meaning questions are text driven and the different ways that writers choose to express information will vary enormously across different papers. This phrase was selected as the intention was to encourage candidates to explore the notion of something being ‘treatable’ Overall, the question seemed to pose few problems for candidates. The question required candidates to read the phrase and to then deduce what was meant. When working on this skill in class, it is worth encouraging candidates to try and use as many of their own words as possible. We felt that candidates who used the words ‘treat’ or ‘treated’ in otherwise credible responses showed sufficient understanding. There were a very wide range of explanations of the word ‘treatable’ but the most common synonyms were: ‘fixed...stopped...cured...’. It is important that candidates demonstrate understanding of the entire phrase as some answers were difficult to credit due to their brevity and resulting vagueness.

One of the stumbling blocks for those who were unsuccessful was the fact that they simply copied down the phrase and any surrounding words from the text without trying to demonstrate their understanding of the phrase. This approach is to be avoided at all costs as it does not show fundamental understanding of what has been read.

This question was allocated only three lines to answer and it was a little worrying that a small minority took the opportunity to write a lengthier explanation. This approach showed an inability to engage with the question and wasted time that could have been more effectively used elsewhere.

**A9. How does Text D try to persuade people that oversleeping can be dangerous?**

*This question tests the ability to use inference and deduction skills to retrieve and analyse information from written texts and reflect on the ways in which texts may be interpreted.*

The ‘how’ question is one which both teachers and candidates are familiar with and this was a typical how question. Candidates were asked to consider how Text D persuades people that oversleeping can be dangerous and there were sufficient details to comment on. With a tariff of 10 marks, it is vital that candidates read more challenging questions very carefully. After marking a number of these responses, it became abundantly clear that those who failed to move beyond Bands 1 and 2 were often those who were struggling to focus on the question set. Many candidates appeared to be answering a different question to the one in this examination. Candidates seemed to want to discuss whether this was a persuasive text and what the features of persuasive writing are. Some candidates wanted to analyse whether the information contained within the text was plausible or reliable and used the evidence they selected to explore the credibility of the arguments presented – rather than considering how the writer persuades us that oversleeping can be dangerous. Some others simply wanted to comment on why you would want to read the article or ‘read on’ – again not something we asked them to consider. To gain credit for answers, candidates must focus solely on the question they have been asked.

Candidates who were focused on the question often included either a range of appropriate details or tended to focus on technique – a balance of the two is best. As was mentioned in this summer’s report, ‘how’ can be answered in different ways. This question is not intended to encourage a relentless hunt for techniques, particularly when some identify these correctly but have limited sense of how they work and, even then, they do not always link them to the relevant section of text/evidence. ‘How’ questions instead aim to encourage candidates to read and understand a writer’s arguments and then consider the question set and how the information is conveyed.

Many candidates who made a good attempt to answer this question did so by mainly concentrating on the content of the passage and its title (candidates could make a credible argument about the title and the use of the colour red for its heading – but only if these were clearly linked to the notion of danger). These answers looked for any correlations between sleep and danger and then explored these carefully. Those who were able to disentangle the information, performed best. Candidates who worked chronologically through the text often produced more coherent and methodical responses. Top band answers were, as always, selective in their choice of material and included concise explanations about the effect of the information included.

**A10. Which of the following can cause teenagers to take longest to fall asleep?**

*This question tests the ability to use deduction skills to retrieve information.*

This question, based on Text E, was intended to challenge the ability of candidates to use deduction skills when reading through a passage. The third paragraph in this text contained the answer to this question but it required candidates to read through the whole paragraph carefully. The passage gave four reasons why teenagers can take time to fall asleep and each reason was accompanied by statistical evidence. To add some complexity, the information was not simply presented as a series of straightforward percentages as sometimes the suggestion was that the time taken to fall asleep was linked to some of the other causes. Those who were able to work their way through the passage and determine a reasonable rank order for the reasons should have found that they were able to answer the question correctly.

**A11. The writer tells us that media use is “detrimental to a teenager’s sleep”. Which of the following definitions best describes what “detrimental” means?**

*This question tests the ability to interpret meaning and ideas in challenging writing.*

This question was also based on Text E and asked candidates to best determine the meaning of the word ‘detrimental’. This was a multiple-choice question and four possible answers were provided. Overall, the question proved to be reasonably straightforward for candidates although credible distractors were included amongst the answers available for selection. The word ‘detrimental’ was used in a sentence where candidates were told that the results of some research prove that media use is ‘detrimental to a teenager’s sleep.’ Most candidates opted for the third option ‘something that causes harm or damage’ but the other three options were also selected by candidates. Substituting the word detrimental for each of the possible options helped some candidates to eliminate some of the options they were presented with.

**A12. Summarise why teenagers should limit their screen time to help them get the sleep they need.**

*This question tests the ability to summarise information.*

In the Principal Examiner's Report for June 2017, this question was given quite a lot of attention. In the summer we were concerned about the summary skills demonstrated by candidates as many struggled to produce an effective, concise summary. A significant proportion of the candidates simply did not summarise the information and, in many cases, produced a 'summary' that was significantly longer than the original. During Autumn CPD sessions, we committed time to discuss this skill and although there were many candidates who could still benefit from honing their summary skills, a number demonstrated the ability to condense and prioritise information. It was also pleasing to note how many candidates made use of bullet points in their answers in November.

The following observations were included in the summer and I would like to reiterate them with the hope of highlighting what is required for a successful summary:

- A summary should be an abbreviated version of the original text
- A summary should be written in a candidate's own words
- A summary should not include any analysis or explanation
- A summary should also be concise. It was quite alarming how many candidates chose to include additional pages when the space included was already generous
- It is perfectly acceptable for a summary to be written in bullet point form
- A summary does not need to be written in full sentences.

The following is an example of a response which would be awarded full marks. Screen time should be limited to:

- Stop teenagers from feeling exhausted
- Stop teenagers from having mood swings
- Reduce the time that it takes to fall asleep
- Positively impact mental health

**A13. Compare what the writers of Texts D and E say about what a person should do to get a healthy amount of sleep.**

*This question tests the ability to interpret themes, meaning, ideas and information in a range of texts and comparing and evaluating the usefulness, relevance and presentation of content.*

To answer this question, candidates were required to compare Text D and Text E. The key to successfully answering a comparison question is to read the question carefully. The question will always give candidates a distinct steer on what they need to compare. In this series, candidates were asked to compare what each text says will help young people get the amount of sleep they need – essentially the advice provided. Another skill required to be able to compare correctly is to find relevant evidence. Once a candidate has relevant evidence they should then be able to collate their ideas which will allow them to produce a valid and relevant comparison. Candidates who embarked on a generic comparison of the two texts usually found that they could only achieve low marks. To reach the top bands, it was essential that the selected evidence was framed correctly, essentially giving advice. This was a straightforward question and those who attempted to answer the question including relevant supporting evidence usually found that their mark was in the 5 to 6 area. Some accessed the top marks by simply extending the level of coverage in their answer whilst maintaining clarity of focus.

A small number of candidates chose to present their ideas in a table format. While they were able to access some marks, this is not an advisable approach for the majority. Understandably candidates operating at the lower end of the ability spectrum may choose this approach to aid clarity of thought and to achieve some credit for the question. Those who are looking to achieve high band marks must collate their answers in a continuous and detailed response. There was no shortage of information to compare across the two texts and most did not struggle to locate a range of different points. Candidates certainly found it easier to locate information from Text D, due to the slightly more challenging nature of Text E. Very few candidates however only wrote about one text although there was some imbalance in terms of the evidence included. As always, timing was an issue.

There are a few barriers to success when completing this type of question:

- Candidates must read the question carefully and remain on task
- Unlike the synthesis question, when candidates produce a comparison, it is imperative that they make it clear from which text their information came
- Candidates need to refer to both texts, not just one
- Candidates need to make as many points as possible from each of the texts. Those who simply write down one or two points will only gain a very small number of marks.

## **Section B**

Candidates were required to produce two pieces of writing (one argumentation and one persuasion) which were linked to the materials studied during the reading examination.

### **Task B1**

To complete B1, candidates were asked to produce an article. Candidates were given the phrase, 'Teenagers spend too much time on their gadgets and not enough time sleeping' and were asked to produce a lively article giving their views on this topic. Given the inclusion of the word 'lively' there was scope for candidates to demonstrate their own sense of humour through the style of their writing and the information included, to ensure that the writing would appeal to readers of the 'school or college magazine'.

Candidates seemed to opt for one of two viewpoints when answering this question. Some (and certainly more than we expected) wholeheartedly supported the notion that the amount of time spent using gadgets is 'too much' when it comes to teenagers, although a small minority chose to extend the criticism to other members of their family. Others were utterly outraged by the statement and sought to argue the case that technology is essential to modern day life.

It is perfectly acceptable for candidates to use some of the information from the source materials used during the reading examination, but this should be used sparingly. A very small minority chose to copy out huge swathes of information and even copied the punctuation used in the original – although not always the correct spellings. It is virtually impossible to credit these responses as the purpose of the task is to encourage candidates to write freely so examiners are able to assess what they can produce themselves.

Close reading of the task was essential. Some candidates seemed to have decided what they were going to write before they had read the task and then produced articles which argued for the benefits of sleep without really touching on the question they were actually given. Some chose to visually present their article in the style of a magazine article (using columns and illustrations) which was also perfectly acceptable although those who did not adopt such features were not penalised. Titles seemed to provide a most useful steer for candidates. A title which clearly linked to the task set seemed to serve as an anchor for the work and encouraged candidates to remain on task.

The level of planning varied across the cohort. Those who pause to plan before writing not only appear to be more likely to remain focused and on task but are usually able to produce a more detailed and cohesive piece of writing.

## **Task B2**

For their second piece of writing, candidates were asked to produce a leaflet to persuade young people that exercise is important. This task was based on a statement from Text D which read, 'regular exercise is important'. Health and exercise is a topic which all young people are most familiar with and this was most apparent in the vast majority of leaflets.

In terms of presentation, although candidates were asked to produce a leaflet, the examination is a test of their ability to write and not their ability to produce graphics. Most candidates realised that although the odd bullet point would be a valid feature of a leaflet, they must demonstrate their ability to write in full sentences to access some of the higher bands for 'Writing Accurately'. A small minority chose not to sentence their work but these pieces were also usually very brief and limited in scope.

Candidates certainly relished the opportunity to showcase the persuasive writing skills they have acquired during their time at school and this task gave them the opportunity to utilise these. During CPD this year we tried to stress the importance of not using punctuation checklists for writing as these make the writing feel forced and disjointed. I did not see a single one of these throughout this series and am extremely grateful to teachers for taking this observation on board. Forced punctuation makes writing stilted and unnatural and in some cases, alters the coherence of a candidate's work. In terms of techniques, we saw a full range of persuasive techniques. The use of statistics was popular, and candidates invented a huge array of statistical data to support their ideas. Rather curiously, a number of candidates referred to research completed at Ohio University. I am unable to understand why this would be preferable to something a little closer to home, for example Cardiff (which most could also spell correctly). Of course, such an inclusion would not impact upon a candidate's mark but it felt less slightly removed from their own experiences.

As with the summer series, timing was an issue and a small minority did not attempt this question. It is vital that candidates are encouraged to reserve sufficient time to complete both writing tasks as they immediately lose one quarter of their marks if they miss either of these.

The same messages about technical accuracy apply equally to the reports for both Units 2 and 3. This is something that we stressed during CPD and technical accuracy remains a concern. Candidates whose writing is littered with errors struggle to produce work that moves beyond Band 2 for Writing Accurately. Inaccurate work also significantly impacts on the coherence of contents. The following are very common issues associated with less successful writing and should be avoided, where possible:

- Basic errors, which impact on meaning
- Loss of task focus
- Unselective copying from the reading materials
- Disjointed arguments (where candidates jump erratically from one idea to the next)
- Brief and undeveloped writing
- Lengthy writing which loses all control and meaning.



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