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# FIRST LANGUAGE RUSSIAN

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<p><b>Paper 0516/02</b> <b>Reading and Directed Writing</b></p>
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## General comments

Generally, the standard of performance was quite high this year, with some impressive work in all three exercises. A very small number failed to answer all three questions due to lack of time, which affected their overall result for this paper.

## Comments on specific questions

### **Section A**

#### **Question 1**

*Short summaries/comparison between two texts*

This turned out to be the most challenging part of the paper for most candidates. The weakest candidates struggled to produce a concise and coherent piece of writing in their own words, displaying lack of skill in summary writing. The following shortcomings were the most common: unfocused writing or failure to concentrate on the relevant points when comparing the texts; frequent copying from the texts; stating the candidate's opinion of the texts and failure to produce a well-argued comparison. Even some of the best candidates, who coped well with this exercise and managed to produce an effective summary of both texts, overlooked some relevant points. On the positive side, the majority of candidates demonstrated a good grasp of stylistically appropriate idiom and grammar.

#### **Question 2**

*Letter to the head of a government department*

Overall, this part of the paper elicited the best performance from the candidates. Answers at the top end of the scale were distinguished by thoughtful and imaginative treatment of the stimulus text, and showed great ability to manipulate the syntactic and stylistic structures of the language in order to produce a convincing piece of writing. On the other end of the scale, answers were lacking in consistency and imagination, with virtually no attempt at stylisation; a few answers consisted of sentences copied from the text and/or sentences from the text that were only very slightly paraphrased. Several candidates failed to observe the conventions of writing a letter. However, most of the answers were competent, falling somewhere in between the two extremes of performance.

### **Section B**

#### **Question 3**

*Conversation between a student and an official from an employment agency*

Most candidates coped well with this exercise and the overall response to this task was satisfactory. Some candidates produced very good answers, characterised by effective and imaginative use of the stimulus article and stylistically appropriate use of syntax and vocabulary. The weakest candidates tended to make poor use of the material and demonstrated insufficient skill in manipulating the language by producing questions and answers that were either unfocused or irrelevant, or by simply copying chunks from the text. A small but significant number of candidates failed to follow the instruction to write a conversation in the form of a dialogue and resorted to using irrelevant descriptive detail.

<p><b>Paper 0516/03</b> <b>Continuous Writing</b></p>
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**General comments**

The overall performance on this paper was satisfactory. The most popular questions were **Question 1** ('What is Happiness?'), **Question 2** ('Genetic Experiments: Arguments for and against'), **Question 7** ('Why Should One Study Foreign Languages?') and **Question 9** ('Should Drugs be Legalised?').

Many candidates were able to produce a competently structured essay with well-linked and well-developed ideas. The essays in the top range were sophisticated, with content, structure, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy and style sustained at a high level. In story writing, a number of candidates demonstrated skilful handling of the narrative, effective use of descriptive devices and stylistic awareness. Others produced competent, if, at times, unimaginative narratives.

Essays in the bottom range usually shared the following shortcomings:

- Failure to address the title adequately. Some candidates were unable to go beyond examples of personal experience and, therefore, failed to present the broader argument. In the case of **Question 6** (*My Favourite Film*) quite a few essays consisted of retelling the plots of films without any attempt at reflection or analysis. In **Question 3**, where the candidates were required to describe their reaction to a poem, a very small number of essays had no obvious links to the content of the poem.
- Inadequate structure. There was quite a number of essays which lacked an introduction and/or conclusion, with ideas and argument tacked together at random.
- Limited style. Examples of this included plain and limited vocabulary, basic syntactic structures or a lack of variation in syntactic structures, lack of sensitivity to register (i.e. inappropriate use of colloquial idiom) and the influence from other languages (usually English) on syntax or forms of expression.
- Incorrect grammar, including wrong use of prepositions and cases, incorrect use of the gerund, wrong conjunctions in subordinate clauses and incorrectly constructed complex sentences.
- Lack of punctuation, including absence of commas in complex and compound sentences, in sentences with gerund and participle constructions and/or in sentences with parenthetical words.
- Incorrect spelling. The spelling of some candidates was erratic. It should be noted, however, that, on the whole, spelling has continued to improve over the last two years.

Finally, as in previous years, a small number of candidates produced work that appeared to have been derived from practiced answers to questions from past papers. Candidates are advised that merely reproducing "prepared" essays, irrespective of the question or the context of the question, will prevent them from gaining credit for their work.