



Independent Schools  
Examinations Board

## **NOTES FROM ENGLISH CPD DAY AT RADLEY COLLEGE, 29 APRIL 2008**

### **Present from Common Entrance Setting Team**

Mr John Venning, St Paul's School (HMC – Chair)  
Mr Christopher Elliott, Radley College (HMC)  
Mrs Mel Footman, St Mary's School, Calne (GSA)  
Miss Susan Carrdus, The Carrdus School (IAPS)  
Mr Andrew Hammond, Copthorne School (IAPS)  
Mr Duncan Murphy, St Andrew's School, Woking (IAPS)

### **Present from ISEB**

Mrs Jennie Williams, General Secretary  
Mrs Ann Entwisle, Administrator

### **Introduction**

John Venning opened the meeting by welcoming over one hundred delegates from junior and senior schools. Introducing the Common Entrance English setting team he explained that although they set the papers they had no control over the marking outcomes. Every senior school had its own marking criteria and set its own grade boundaries. Mark schemes supplied by the Board were not prescriptive. Senior schools were free to mark papers as they wished and each school looked for different things.

### **11 + English**

Susan Carrdus began by pointing out that the 11+ examination was both an examination in its own right and an examination which underpinned the 13+ syllabus and papers, being part of the continuum to GCSE. She explained the structure of the 11+ examination which was designed to be a qualifying one – showing a candidate's ability level for reading and writing – rather than a selective one. Papers were subject to change in response to comments from user schools and therefore feedback was always welcomed. The papers were intended to be friendly and predictable for this young age, so that most candidates could take them in their stride. Junior schools were encouraged to speak to senior schools about supporting weaker candidates, for example by reading passages to them or providing a scribe.

In Paper 1, the setters aimed to produce interesting and appealing passages from well-regarded children's authors. They were usually fiction. Questions were designed to be clear and accessible, with some easy opening questions to build confidence. More

searching questions followed where candidates were expected to comment on language use and discuss character. The final questions carried more marks and usually required candidates to write a diary entry or character analysis or to continue the story in the same style as the author.

In Paper 2, the setters aimed to produce a paper with a wide range of writing prompts. Receiver schools expected candidates to produce about one and a half sides of well-structured writing, using paragraphs. Marks out of ten were available for a good standard of spelling, punctuation and syntax.

Miss Carrdus offered a number of suggestions for preparing for the 11+ examinations, from her own experience. These included mainly oral work on character, register and points of view, to help candidates develop a positive attitude towards the English needed for any entrance examination.

Delegates raised questions about the length of the examination and the presentation of the papers. Some queried the number of essay titles in the writing paper; too much choice could confuse candidates.

The General Secretary advised delegates to make their views known, in writing, to their Associations as well as to the Board.

### **13+ English**

Christopher Elliott stressed the importance of a dialogue between junior and senior schools. Senior schools should be accountable for how they assessed candidates and junior schools should request feedback, particularly if they felt a candidate, or cohort, had been marked too harshly. Common Entrance papers were often marked quickly and not all senior schools used the mark schemes provided. Some schools marked for SPAG (spelling, punctuation and grammar), others did not. SPAG was important, however, in the case of borderline candidates and for setting at senior school.

Mel Footman spoke about the non-fiction section of Paper 1. When setting the papers, the team looked for a variety of passages of literary merit. The paper was designed to test a range of skills, as outlined in the ISEB English syllabus on the website. These included the production of answers which were relevant to the question and the text, effective use of quotations, knowledge of simple literary terms (e.g. simile, metaphor), the ability to evaluate characters and identify themes, to make comparisons, and to offer opinions supported by evidence from the passage. Candidates should pay attention to the mark allocation and provide depth in their answers to the later, more searching questions.

Christopher Elliott spoke about the poetry section of Paper 1. The setters aimed to provide quality poetry which would allow strong candidates to shine and go beyond the literal. The questions were designed to assess the skills outlined in the syllabus. The usual format was to have a starter question, followed by questions to assess understanding of poetic language and technique and the ideas contained in the poem. The last question was a differentiator, intended to identify candidates who could get to the heart of what the poem was about. It was necessarily demanding.

Mel Footman made it clear that for the studied literature section of Paper 2 there was no book list of acceptable or suggested titles. Setters wanted schools to have the flexibility to choose texts which they thought would be of interest to their candidates. The aim was for candidates to enjoy literature and communicate this through their answers. There were

four questions in the literature section: two relating to the theme and two open questions. Themes changed every three years, as identified in the syllabus.

Skills tested were those outlined in the syllabus. Candidates' answers should be well-planned with an appropriate introduction and conclusion. They should demonstrate enthusiasm for, and engagement with, the text and substantiate their arguments using appropriate and well-discussed examples. As markers, they were looking for quality rather than quantity and often found that answers were too long, vague and generalised. Candidates should be encouraged to produce fluent, concise and accurate responses which demonstrated an ability to analyse and evaluate the texts. In general, candidates would not be required to memorise quotations but junior schools should communicate with senior schools about what was expected. Credit would certainly be given for well-chosen quotations. However, junior schools should discourage candidates from producing prepared answers. The team found that candidates from schools which had studied a wide range of texts tended to have little difficulty tackling the questions.

When setting the Section B writing task, the team tried to be as broad as possible and offer stimuli which would open up a range of possible responses. Christopher Elliott spoke about what he was looking for when marking the papers. These included independent thinking, language as 'texture rather than vehicle', character and mood as opposed to incident-driven writing, and a clear structure. Candidates should be encouraged to link their openings with their endings, to consider location, and to write within a small timescale. He offered suggestions for stimulating good writing, including offering titles with multiple meanings (e.g. signals, reflection, light etc.) and quotations from popular songs which could be used as the basis for developing a character. Other ideas included symbols and motifs (e.g. staircase, garden gate) and images which could be used to open and close a story (e.g. birds circling in the air, someone looking through a window). Candidates should avoid writing about superheroes, saving the planet, becoming rich and famous, blood, and breakfast! Candidates should also avoid preparing a list of impressive words which they would include in their writing.

### **Common Academic Scholarship Paper**

John Venning said that it was expected that the scholarship paper would receive a huge range of marks, with the questions designed to be challenging in order to identify the most able candidates. He invited comments from the delegates, some of whom urged the regular inclusion of a creative element. Many spoke positively about the standard of the CASE papers and said that they gave teachers the opportunity to challenge and work freely with their top students. The introduction of the new marking guidelines was much appreciated.

### **13+ Foundation Papers**

Delegates were invited to comment upon the proposed 13+ Foundation Papers. Consultation copies had been sent out to schools, with questionnaires to be completed and returned to Jordan House by 20 June. The papers had been introduced in response to requests from junior schools for an examination which could be accessible to less able candidates. If adopted, the papers would be in addition to the standard Common Entrance papers, not instead of them. Specimen Paper 1 was a free-standing paper, while Specimen Paper 2 used the same passage as the Common Entrance paper, but had easier questions. Delegates made suggestions about the format and font, and about the length of the examination. John Venning said that the setters were very keen to receive feedback and would respond accordingly.