TWGHs Wong Fut Nam College

Mock Examination

2020-2021

Form 6 English Paper I – Reading

Reading Passage

Setter: CSY **Date: 13 January 2021**

Total marks: 85 **Time: 8:30 am – 10:00 am**

Total no. of pages: 6 **Time allowed: 1.5 hours**

Name _____ Class: F6 _____ Class No _____

INSTRUCTIONS

1 Write all your answers in the Question-Answer Book.

2 Do NOT write any answers in this booklet. It will not be collected at the end of the examination.

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PART A [44 marks]

Read Text 1 and answer questions 1-20 on the Question-Answer Book.

Is tech good for us? Maybe more than you think

[1] More money, more problems, the saying goes. And it is true, certainly, that wealth comes with a new set of things to worry about. The same is true of the explosion of technologies centred around the Internet that have taken over our lives in the past few decades. New concerns range from loneliness and dwindling attention spans to job losses and political extremism. These are indeed problems, and to some degree they are indeed new. But as with money, the new problems associated with tech do not outweigh the benefits. Despite its growing pains, technology offers us a brighter future in the long run.

[2] Worries about what computers and smartphones are doing to our brains are valid. We experience the world now through the Internet, in a way that no one has before and that evolution could never have prepared us for. 'The novelty of this technology means there are unknown risks,' explains Maria Leung, a psychology professor who studies the effects of technology on the brain. 'That alone should concern us.' Nevertheless, some of the threats offered by this experience are not as great or unique as they seem.

[3] Consider the endless debates about modern entertainment: video games, smartphone games, TV on demand, video streaming – 'You can make a case for or against any of these', says Leon Mok, an author and lecturer who writes about 21st century culture. 'Video games are relaxing, they promote motor skills and problem-solving skills, they let people socialize and bond. Or, they are mindlessly repetitive, they make us sedentary, they isolate us from each other.'

[4] A similar debate simmers over whether the modern proliferation of TV and video content enriches our lives with more artistic and informative content than ever, or dumbs everything down with more and more meaningless visual stimulation. 'And of course,' says Mok, 'both are true.'

[5] Leung points to research showing that spending long hours on digital entertainment lowers people's level of happiness. 'With this constant stimulation, in the end you're not entertained, you're bored. The more you get the more you want, so you always feel dissatisfied and cannot focus on anything else.'

[6] Yet the same research shows that people who spend an hour or two a day on such things actually feel better than those who do not. The bottom line is that if we use them right, TV and video games can make us happier. Surely that is not so shocking? And while they might decrease our attention span as Leung says, they can be no worse than the constant interruptions of modern communication: texts, emails and other messages reaching us at all times of day. If these are acceptable distractions, why aren't video games? If we're going to have smartphones and laptops anyway, what's the harm in having access to an abundance of TV shows and films we'll never finish watching?

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[7] It is clear that texts and emails have indeed been deemed acceptable. We cannot imagine going back to a world without them, because the possibilities they open up are so great. Take one example: work. For office workers, 'any work arrangement is possible now', says Leah Wong, the CEO of a company that sells videoconferencing software. 'Not just with my company's product – something as simple as email lets people work from their apartment, or from a remote beach if you prefer.' Even if you are going into the office, you can work irregular hours and still know you can get in touch with your coworkers – anytime, anywhere – thanks to the Internet. The need to all occupy the same office space at the same time has mostly disappeared.

[8] There are certainly downsides to this. Easy communication means more communication, including pointless communications. Workers spend more and more of their time dealing with video meetings and email chains that they do not really need to be part of, but are, because it is easy to include them. More alarming is the way work can creep into free time. Leung notes, 'The idea that colleagues can reach you anytime and anywhere means that you're always on the clock.'

[9] This is a concern that Wong has heard about. 'People say, "Your software lets me attend meetings while on vacation in Italy. Will that make it easier for me to take vacations, or just harder for me to enjoy them?" We would argue the former, of course, but it's a reasonable concern.' Indeed, the technology in itself has the potential for either outcome. But by setting clear boundaries around leisure time, we can choose the option in which technology is liberating, not intrusive.

[10] Video games and work-life balance are popular topics of debate, but one subject is even more controversial – perhaps rightly so considering the scale of its potential effects – social media. This is where the individual effects of technology meet the societal effects. 'Social media can make you lonely, angry, or misinformed, but because of its nature it can actually do those things to millions of people at once', says Leung. 'At an individual level, it's a mental health issue; at a societal level, it's hatred, division and distrust, all of which can lead to widespread social problems.'

[11] This is a real problem, but it does not have to be. 'The algorithm that decides what to show you does not have to be this way,' says Leung. 'It's a choice.' Better-designed social media could show us useful information instead of fake news, and find us new friends instead of new enemies. As with the drawbacks of social media, its benefits are both individual and social. By spreading ideas and information, social media has allowed people to become better informed about important issues; by facilitating communication, new communities and relationships have been formed. We should work to promote this kind of social networking, rather than giving up on the idea altogether.

[12] And then there are the aspects of technology that have received less attention, but have transformative potential. Suppose you want to take an English lesson, but there is no English tutor in your town. Or, there is one, but the service they offer is too expensive for you. The Internet allows you to find English lessons you can afford, and allows you to take them anywhere in the world. In the same way, the web is making other services accessible as well, such as therapy and medical consultations; one day, remote surgery may even be a reality.

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[13] Even this use of technology – though it seems obviously beneficial to both the people who need these services and the people who provide them – comes with risks. The one real-life tutor in town may lose their job to online competition. The therapy patient may feel less supported doing online sessions. Still, looking at the big picture, it is clear that making crucial services cheap and plentiful will elevate our quality of life in society.

[14] Many objections to technology's encroachment in our lives are based on how we have become dependent on it in some way – no longer capable of operating without it. They say we cannot do maths in our heads any more – we need our phones to do it. We cannot keep ourselves occupied or entertained – we rely on a constant stream of stimulation from our devices. We do not know how to write a letter or simply talk to our friends any more – instead we communicate through carefully crafted text messages. It is true that there are risks to becoming so dependent on something that we struggle without it. But we are dependent on it because it is useful, in the same way we are dependent on vehicles and indoor plumbing and all the other infrastructure of modern life. That is the price of progress. The reason we use the Internet and electronic gadgets so much, the reason we need them in our lives, is that, in the end, they bring positive changes to our existences.

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PART B [41 marks]

Read Text 2 and answer questions 21–43 on the Question-Answer Book.

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[1] 'On Friday I was at office from 10 in the morning to 11 at night—last night til 9,' writes Charles Lamb in his diary. 'You don't know how wearisome it is to breathe the air of four pent walls without relief day after day.' The words could have been written yesterday. In fact, they were penned by a clerk of the East India Company in London in the 18th century. The last 200 years have seen many changes, but shorter working hours are sadly not one of them.

[2] Like Charles, many modern-day workers spend more time in the office than at home, and more time with their colleagues than with their loved ones. It's little wonder the office environment can have such a tangible impact on our well-being and happiness, yet it's only recently that workers' needs have become paramount in the minds of office designers.

[3] The word 'office' goes all the way back to ancient Rome and the Latin word 'officium', which means 'bureau'. A *bureau* initially described the people who came together for a meeting rather than the place where that meeting took place, but certainly the ancient Romans had organized gatherings to discuss business or important matters of the day.

[4] The first incarnation of what we would understand as an office building was not constructed until the 18th century, as companies began to extend their international reach. The first-ever purpose-built office block, the Ripley Building, was erected in 1726 in London for the Royal Navy. In 1729, East India House was built to centrally manage the operations of the East India Company, thereby increasing efficiency and maximizing profit. It was perhaps the first-ever business headquarters in the modern sense.

[5] It wasn't until over a hundred years later that the first skyscraper was built, in 1864 in Liverpool. Oriel Chambers was only five storeys high, but its design forged new paths: the internal iron structure meant that there was no need for brick walls to support it, allowing for large glass curtain walls.

[6] 'The large expanses of glass allowed more light in, and this meant that a larger area of office space could be used without the need for artificial lighting,' says Sandra Vallance, an architectural historian. 'As was almost inevitable, Oriel Chambers had a lot of critics, but it was also hugely influential.'

[7] One young Liverpudlian who fell under its spell was John Wellborn Root, who would go on to become a leading architect at the Chicago School of Architecture. He took the magic dust with him across the pond and sprinkled it into the designs of numerous skyscrapers that shot up in the 1880s in New York and Chicago.

[8] The appeal of the skyscraper increased further as a finite amount of land became increasingly expensive. The development of steel-frame engineering and the lift meant that buildings could now go higher than ten storeys, allowing companies to pack up to ten times the usual workforce into the same parcel of land. Building upwards—not outwards—became the norm, and by the early 20th century the skyscraper explosion had really taken off.

[9] In the early 1900s, Frederick Winslow Taylor, a proponent of the Efficiency Movement, became hugely influential in office design. His focus was on improving efficiency and ensuring a smooth workflow, and while workers were protected from external noise and pollution with hermetically sealed office spaces and air-conditioning systems, Taylor's office layout involved grim ranks of desks, with managers seated around the outside to supervise their workers. The focus was on fitting in as many workers as possible in order to maximize use of floor space.

[10] By the 1940s, the Taylor office was beginning to look outdated. 'With the widespread use of air conditioning and fluorescent lighting, workers could be positioned anywhere within an office space,' explains Harry Koh, architect. 'This was the birth of the open-plan office. It wasn't necessarily very

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democratic, though—workers were still often arranged in pools, with managers in offices and board members on the top floor, with the biggest offices and best views from their new vantage points at the top of skyscrapers.'

[11] Eberhard and Wolfgang Schnelle of Germany sparked the Bürolandschaft movement in the 1950s. The word means 'office landscape', and their aim was to break the rigidity of traditional corporate structures and to place greater emphasis on meeting workers' needs. For the first time, office furniture was loosely arranged to create different environments where workers could interact, as a way to build communication and greater democracy within companies—a laudable, if not realized, goal.

[12] In the 1980s, designers gravitated towards the theory that staff would be more productive if they had their own private workspace. Modular furniture with high walls was born, and with it came the office cubicle farm. The trend didn't last long. 'Although many staff enjoyed personalizing their cubicle walls with photos and posters from home, cubicle farms weren't necessarily good for fostering communication,' says Koh. 'Many cubicle walls were too high to see over.'

[13] The birth of the Internet in the 1990s meant that workers were no longer tethered to their place of work. Now, digital nomads could work from home, the café, their hotel room. Hot desking became popular, and businesses began expecting their employees to work from home for a certain proportion of the week. 'Our company sold our expensive office block and moved to cheaper premises,' says Wendy Chou, HR manager for a marketing agency. 'The office was smaller, the rent lower, and we installed 1,500 hot desks for our 3,000 staff, assuming everyone works from home at least 50 per cent of the time. In general, the feedback has been positive, though some staff say it's harder to feel at home when your desk changes every day.'

[14] And what of the office of tomorrow? Maximizing use of floor space is no longer paramount for interior designers: modern office buildings have employee welfare at heart (not just out of altruism: happy workers are more productive and absent less often). Offices of the future are likely to have adaptable working areas: that means you'll always be able to find a suitable place to work, whether you're brainstorming in a group of 20 or working in silence on your own. Interior designer Max Thorne says the days of rows of desks are long gone. 'What you'll see more of is ergonomic furniture, things like standing desks,' he says. 'Also, more features found in the home will find their way into the office, like colourful sofas and lampshades, so that workers can really be themselves. Plants will improve air quality, and break-out areas and coffee stations will reduce stress for workers.' It is also likely that there will be wireless docking stations and wireless display connections, allowing for BYOD and CYOD (bring your own device and choose your own device—where employees have greater choice over what laptop, phone or tablet they use). All in all, offices of the future will make spending time in them more palatable, which is just as well since, like Charles Lamb, workers today still spend a huge chunk of their life at work.

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