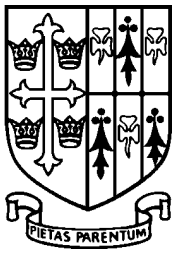
ST EDWARD'S
OXFORD



16+ ENTRANCE EXAMINATION

For entry in 2017

ENGLISH
AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE

Time: 1 hour

Task 1: Reading comprehension

The True Cost of Food

For more than forty years the cost of food has been rising. It has now reached a point where a growing number of people believe that it is far too high, and that bringing it down will be one of the great challenges of the twenty first century. The cost, however, is not in immediate cash. In the West at least, most food is now far cheaper to buy in relative terms than it was in 1960. The cost is in the collateral damage of the very methods of food production that have made the food cheaper: in the pollution of water, the enervation of soil, the destruction of wildlife, the harm to animal welfare and the threat to human health caused by modern industrial agriculture.

First mechanisation, then mass use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, then monocultures, then battery rearing of livestock, and now genetic engineering – the onward march of intensive farming has seemed unstoppable in the last half-century, as the yields of produce have soared. But the damage it has caused has been colossal. In Britain, for example, many of our best-loved farmland birds, such as the skylark, the grey partridge, the lapwing and the corn bunting, have vanished from huge stretches of countryside, as have even more wild flowers and insects. This is a direct result of the way we have produced our food in the last four decades. Thousands of miles of hedgerows, thousands of ponds, have disappeared from the landscape. Natural soil fertility is dropping in many areas because of continuous industrial fertiliser and pesticide use, while the growth of algae is increasing in lakes because of the fertiliser run-off.

Put it all together and it looks like a battlefield, but consumers rarely make the connection at the dinner table. That is mainly because the costs of all this damage are what economists refer to as externalities: they are outside the main transaction, which is for example producing and selling a field of wheat, and are borne directly by neither producers nor consumers. To many, the costs may not even appear to be financial at all, but merely aesthetic – a terrible shame, but nothing to do with money. And anyway they, as consumers of food, certainly aren't paying for it, are they?

But the costs to society can actually be quantified and, when added up, can amount to staggering sums. A remarkable exercise in doing this has been carried out by one of the world's leading thinkers on the future of agriculture, Professor Jules Petty, director of the Centre for Environment and Society at the University of Essex. Professor Pretty and his colleagues calculated the externalities of British agriculture for one particular year. They added up the costs of repairing the damage it caused and came up with a total figure of £2,343 million. This is equivalent to £208 for every hectare of arable land and permanent pasture, almost as much again as the total government and EU spend on British farming in that year. And according to Professor Pretty, it was a conservative estimate.

So, can the true cost of food be brought down? Breaking away from industrial agriculture as the solution to hunger may be very hard for some countries, but in Britain, where the immediate need to supply food is less urgent, and the costs and the damage of intensive farming have been clearly seen, it may be more realistic. The government needs to create sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sectors, which will contribute to a thriving and sustainable rural economy, and advance environmental economic, health, and animal welfare goals. Professor Pretty suggests that the government should introduce a 'Greener Food Standard' which would push the market towards more sustainable environmental practices in areas such as chemical use, soil health, land management, water and energy use, food safety and animal health. This would go a long way towards creating a more sustainable system of agriculture.

In your own words, summarise what you think this article is about. (80 – 100 words)

Task 2: Writing

A new government has decided to ban the use of mobile phones for children under the age of sixteen.

Write a letter to a newspaper explaining your views on this proposal.

Here are some possible areas to think about:

- Safety
- Internet bullying
- Social media
- Games
- Time not spent on other activities or face to face relationships

But you are free to choose any arguments you like.

You should write about 250 words.