

Read the text below and answer Questions 1–3 on the question paper.

### TEXT 1

*This text is from a newspaper article about a recruitment drive for MI6.*

#### **Psst! Want to join MI6?**

#### **As Britain's foreign intelligence service celebrates its 100th anniversary, Neil Tweedie gets an insight into MI6's latest recruitment drive.**

Recruiting for HM Secret Intelligence Service used to be a subtle, stylish business. One afternoon in term time, a promising undergraduate at Oxford or Cambridge would find himself invited to tea with the college talent spotter.

In the quiet of an oak-panelled study, the potential recruit (right school, right family) would be subjected to gentle interrogation over crumpets, before being asked (clink of spoon on china) if he had ever considered 'official work'. If the encounter proved satisfactory, the candidate received a letter inviting him to an interview. Fast-forward three years and there is our man in a crumpled linen suit, sitting in a Lisbon café sizing up his target, a Czech military attaché. 5

SIS, popularly known as MI6, Britain's foreign intelligence service, which this year celebrates its 100th birthday, has tiptoed into the modern world. Faced with the threat of international terrorism it has had to cast its net wider than the cloisters<sup>1</sup> of Oxbridge<sup>2</sup> and a few other favoured universities to find recruits who look the part. That increasingly means people from the ethnic minorities. 10

There is a demand for more women, too. Not just bluestockings<sup>3</sup>, but the kind who know what to do with scatter cushions. Only that could explain the presence of *Good Housekeeping* at a recent SIS press conference held at Tate Modern in London, intended to stimulate more applications from target groups. 15

It was a curious affair, a rare venturing out of the shadows for serving SIS officers – but also very conventional. "Work you can believe in. Colleagues you can trust," promised the displays. There were four of them: a historian from the Cabinet Office called Mark, a senior SIS recruiting officer called John and two younger officers, Catherine and Nick. No one asked if these were their real names but it would have been disappointing if they were. John would have stood out in a crowd — tall, elegant, forties, patrician — but Nick and Catherine were very normal. He was black, thirties, smart — typical young businessman; she was attractive, friendly, early thirties — might have been a French teacher. 20 25

The ladies from *Good Housekeeping*, *Cosmopolitan* and *Marie Claire* wanted lifestyle. What was it like being a spy? Could you tell your mum? Nick, a softly-spoken south Londoner, state educated and first in his family to attend university, was talent spotted 10 years ago. He could hardly not tell his wife, who worked in the City, and had informed his mother and father. But he had managed to conceal his clandestine life from his friends. Based at 'head office' in London, following assignments in Africa and the Middle East, Nick was initially attracted to MI6 by the chance to travel – an SIS officer may spend months in a country absorbing its culture. After joining he was 'amazed' how friendly it was. 30 35

"Occasionally you do work long hours. It might be midnight in the UK but it's midday in another part of the world. But I do get to drop my daughter at nursery and pick her up."

Catherine joined SIS nine years ago after applying for the Foreign Office. Her concern was that it might be dangerous, “but I can tell you that it’s not. The safety of staff is paramount. You are never asked to do anything you are not happy with.” 40

The selection process takes nine months for a successful candidate, beginning with the online application form. Applicants must be British and hold a 2:2 degree or above.

Up to 80 per cent of applicants fail the application form. Half the applicants selected for first interview fall at that hurdle, and half the remainder fail the second interview. The process continues with an assessment course. Five per cent of applicants fail personal vetting. 45

What kind of people do SIS want in their recruitment in-tray? “Motivated problem-solvers who do not crave the limelight. People who are good at building relationships. You may have to ask people to supply information that may place them in danger.”

<sup>1</sup> open areas surrounded by walkways

<sup>2</sup> the universities of Oxford and Cambridge, the oldest universities in the United Kingdom

<sup>3</sup> educated, intelligent women

(Source: © Want to join MI6, Neil Tweedie, Telegraph)

Read the text below and answer Questions 4–7 on the question paper.

## TEXT 2

*Leo Marks worked in Intelligence during World War 2. He was responsible for breaking codes to uncover enemy information. In this extract he describes how a complex code was solved to uncover a secret message.*

The first message was fifty letters long, the second fifty-five and the third only twenty. The first step was to take a frequency count of the individual letters, then of the pairs of letters and finally of the three-letter combinations. The girls, some of whom had come armed with German dictionaries, set about this tedious task as if they were embarking on an early-morning run. It became increasingly uphill.

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The frequency count confirmed that a substitution code had been used, and it seemed safe to assume that with millions of guilders<sup>1</sup> at stake the government-in-exile would use an unbreakable code, and I proceeded on that basis. And got nowhere.

After three days of trying every permutation I could think of, the girls had lost all confidence in me and I was pleased with their good judgement. I was now on the floor myself, with my self-esteem more crumpled than the day's newspaper. I opened my eyes and discovered that my hand was resting on something. It was a copy of an agent's Playfair code, an elementary system suitable for concealing brief messages in 'innocent letters', but for very little else. It was marginally more secure than invisible ink. But could Playfair be the answer? It would explain the lack of indicators, the frequency of the consonants and the repetition of the pairs of letters. And it was possible that the three messages had been enciphered<sup>2</sup> on the same Playfair phrase.

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I hurried in to the girls, who were less than pleased to see me. Doing my best not to stammer, I said that there was one last thing to be tried.

'Our patience,' one of them whispered.

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I showed them how to break Playfair (it was just tricky enough to interest them) and then hurried away.

After slogging away for twenty-four hours without the slightest success the telephone rang. It was the team supervisor, but I could hardly hear what she was saying above the babble in the background. One of the girls thought she'd found a German word, but the linguist was convinced it was Dutch.

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She was right.

Two hours later the messages were clear, and the cheer that went up in the code room could have been heard in the Netherlands.

<sup>1</sup> the currency of the Netherlands during World War 2

<sup>2</sup> information converted from plain text into a code

### Sources:

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'20th Century Non-Fiction' 'Between Silk and Cyanide: A Code Maker's War 1941–1945' by Leo Marks (1998)

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