Part 3

Read the following newspaper article and then answer questions 25–30 on page 91. Indicate the letter A, B, C or D against the number of each question 25–30. Give only one answer to each question. In the exam, you will mark your answers on a separate answer sheet.

A career in comedy? It's no laughing matter!

At one time the notion of a career on stage may have been frowned upon, but nowadays parents would be well advised to actually push their offspring into the safe and lucrative world of comedy. If the number of awards, the profusion of clubs and the amount of lucrative broadcasting work available are anything to go by, comedy is the new accountancy. Where once a stand-up comedian would have to endure years on the circuit of small-time venues and get paid in free drinks and curled-up sandwiches, comedians can now work in several media and even be paid a regular salary for writing jokes for TV and media. The live comedy circuit has mushroomed and the general public seem to have an insatiable appetite for comedic talent both in front of and behind the camera.

‘The advent of multi-channel TV is behind this comedy revolution,’ says William Burdett-Coutts, artistic director of one of the top venues for comedy during the famous Edinburgh Festival Fringe. ‘I put it down to when television programmers at Channel 4 created a new interest in comedy. That’s what sparked it off, and now with so many channels there are hours of airtime to be filled. There is a fairly constant demand for new talent.’ The festival sees the culmination of five comedy awards that are regarded in the industry as one long audition for lucrative TV work. ‘The eventual winners will possibly get guaranteed runs at the prestigious Montreal and Melbourne comedy festivals but the ultimate lure for many, though, is the thought of being snapped up by a top agent,’ he says.

Edinburgh is only one of the many comedy festivals in Britain where comedians can ply their trade. Several other British cities have festivals but Burdett-Coutts cautions that it’s not all milk and honey for those seeking fame and fortune. ‘Manchester struggles to keep its venues going, Newcastle has closed them all, and London is a hard one to crack as there is so much going on there all the time. There are many, many comedians who have been around for years without a breakthrough.’ Nevertheless, he still maintains that there’s room for another comedy festival in a seemingly overcrowded market and points out that October sees the launch of the Brighton Comedy Festival.

Despite the risk of obscurity, the openings for talented funny people are many and varied – and it’s not necessarily performers that TV wants to lure. As Lisa Thomas, director of an agency which handles several top comics, says, ‘Not so long ago, TV producers would want to see someone up there performing live, and audience reaction was the bottom line. What you have these days is a concern with the comic’s creative potential. They may think someone doesn’t quite have it on stage, but has a talent that could be put to better use coming up with ideas for sketches in established TV shows or even for editing scripts.’

While Thomas welcomes the extra money and audience interest that awards attract, she believes they are hardly an automatic guarantee of well-paid comedy life, but rather they act as an industry ‘shop window’. ‘They are definitely the foot in the door,’ she says. ‘The awards do secure work for newcomers and a lot of them feel they have to pay their dues and do live performance for a couple of years before they can call themselves a comedian. It certainly helps in terms of knowing whether a joke is “sayable” or if the timing’s right when they go into writing or production.’

One comedian who made the deviation from delivering the jokes himself to writing for others is Phil Whelans. Although he does the occasional live performance and voiceover work for commercials, he now considers himself a writer and made the career change in the late 1990s after his comedy act with a partner broke up. ‘I couldn’t face starting over, doing try-out sessions,’ says Whelans. ‘The scene is so diluted now – there are hundreds of competent, blandish, slightly uninteresting stand-ups who I would be up against and my heart sank at the thought.’ And the money? ‘The rates vary wildly,’ says Whelans, who is currently devising an improvised sitcom for TV. ‘I’ve seen writers turn ashen with jealousy when they hear what others can earn, but believe me, it’s a very decent living for most.’
25 What does the writer state about a career in comedy in the past?
   A Comedians used to expect a reasonable salary.
   B There was a range of awards comedians could aim for.
   C A career in comedy tended to last longer than today.
   D There was disapproval of people giving public performances.

26 According to William Burdett-Coutts, comedians often take part in the Edinburgh Festival
   A to challenge current notions of comedy.
   B to demonstrate their comic ability.
   C to appear to as wide an audience as possible.
   D to compete with each other for money.

27 What does Burdett-Coutts state about the current opportunities for comedians?
   A A career in comedy may not always be rewarding.
   B Comedians should avoid venues in large cities.
   C There are many inadequate comedians seeking work.
   D The launch of another festival is fairly pointless.

28 According to Lisa Thomas, TV producers are looking for comedians who
   A are capable of producing material for others.
   B come across as confident in live performance.
   C enjoy a good rapport with their audiences.
   D are realistic about their chances of success.

29 What does Lisa Thomas say about comedy awards?
   A They ensure comedians gain experience before entering comedy festivals.
   B They usually mean that comedians will enjoy a successful career.
   C They lead to opportunities where comedians can experiment with material.
   D They help comedians decide which branch of comedy they are suited to.

30 Why did Phil Whelans choose to become a comedy writer?
   A He felt he was no longer at competition standard.
   B He believed he would earn a regular salary as a writer.
   C He had found it difficult to work as part of a team.
   D He did not have the enthusiasm to develop a new act.
Part 4

Answer questions 31–52 by referring to the magazine article on pages 93–94, in which five men are interviewed about their jobs. In the exam, you will mark your answers on a separate answer sheet.

For questions 31–52 answer by choosing from the list of men (A–E). Some of the choices may be required more than once.

Note: When more than one answer is required, these may be given in any order.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Choice</th>
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<tr>
<td>31 He appreciates the fact that his work has received professional recognition.</td>
<td>A John Hughes</td>
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<td>32 His job requires a constant high level of concentration.</td>
<td>B Mick Beasley</td>
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<td>33 He does not consider himself to be a full-time professional.</td>
<td>C Johnny Kitts</td>
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<td>34 He has more of a managerial role than he used to.</td>
<td>D Chris Macrae</td>
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<td>35 His current career is the result of a desire to work from a permanent location.</td>
<td>E Jarrod Scott</td>
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<td>36 He is prepared to take limited risks.</td>
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<td>37 He admits that he does not perform one of his duties particularly well.</td>
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<td>38 He would appreciate greater freedom in one aspect of his work.</td>
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<td>39 He appreciates the ability of the people he is responsible for.</td>
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<td>40 He gets a sense of satisfaction from knowing people rely on him.</td>
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<td>41 He appreciates the comments that other people have made about his skills.</td>
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<td>42 He likes the fact that he is exposed to constant change in his job.</td>
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<td>43 He resents the bureaucracy that is part of his job.</td>
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<td>44 His training did not require any academic component.</td>
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<td>45 He dislikes the poor conditions that he sometimes has to face.</td>
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<td>46 He accepts the fact that there is a negative aspect to his work.</td>
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<td>47 He likes to see the moods and reactions of each person he is responsible for.</td>
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Take a step outside!

Do you ever feel ‘stuck in the office’? We spoke to five men with outdoor jobs and asked them about the reality of working outside.

A Name: John Hughes Occupation: Academic Leader for Adventure Recreation

I've been working in the outdoor sports and activities industry since I was 22, but whereas I used to go climbing myself, I've got more of an academic position now I'm at the polytechnic. I work with students and focus my skills on demonstrating how mountaineering groups should be run and organised. The best aspect is the quality of the students but this is the course's first year and we still have to see how it works out. But so far, so good. I've always got a lot out of my work but a day that jumps to mind was when I was working with the Wild South film crew in Antarctica. We had to climb down into the crater of Erebus and the volcano was semi-active that day, but it was the only day the cameras could go down. The volcano was throwing bits and pieces at us, so it was pretty amazing being inside while it was partly erupting. That kind of thing appeals to me. I can't think of anything that is particularly frustrating, other than that sometimes on a lovely day you have to work inside and on a horrible day you're outside. Unfortunately, there isn't currently a way around having enough flexibility in the programme to accommodate that. What does bother me are the endless meetings and things to do within the polytechnic system, which don't always seem relevant to how you might actually improve the programme for students.

B Name: Mick Beasley Occupation: Mountain Guide

For years I was going back and forth between the USA and New Zealand teaching skiing – 25 winters in a row. Eventually, I just wanted to settle down and find a base. That meant I needed a summer job so I started learning about summer mountain guiding. Now I have a great affection for this season and the advantage of working in a small company is that I'm hardly ever indoors. I prefer trips which aren't technical, but difficult, and where without a guide it would be beyond most people's ability, and it's rewarding to know they appreciate that fact. I only deal with groups of 4–5 people as it's hard to find wilderness when you travel in large numbers. I'm at an age when I resent doing things that I don't enjoy so I offer places to the clients that I want to go to anyway. Dealing with some of the older dilapidated shelters is not always pleasant, especially having to clean up after irresponsible previous occupants. Working with people is not difficult in the mountains; they are so far out of their element that they tend to have faith in you implicitly and are easy to get along with. To do a job like mine I think it's essential that you attend the best courses, although it's not a legal requirement. To go through this training and have other people look at your work and get their input is invaluable.

C Name: Johnny Kitts Occupation: Jet-boat driver

I've been driving commercially for 18 years on various rivers and every day is a highlight. Probably on a day-to-day basis, it's just the varying nature of the area we operate in. What isn't so pleasant is picking hikers up on dangerous parts of the river. We do get a lot of hikers wanting to cross the river and we try our best to get people in and out of those areas no matter what the conditions are like. There are cut-off points that we believe are not safe to operate above, but mostly we try our hardest to get the trekkers out by boat. There's probably not a dull part with any jet-boat job, especially on commercial trips. You've got to be aware of what is happening all the time, you can't switch off about anything on the trip. That's when the boat ends up stuck in the shallows. I am now more involved in scheduling other drivers, so I don't spend as much time on the river as I did, which is a bit of a downpoint at times. For commercial driving it's learning as you go – time on the river with checks done by the local harbour master. You get a good idea of a driver's ability after about 25 hours. Some people have trouble reading shallow water and if you're colour blind this is a major problem as you can't pick out colouration in the water. It's experience of the river and conditions that counts and that continues for as long as you jet-boat.