Passage A: Teleworking – why aren't more of us working from home?
This article explores the issues that surround the increasing practice of working from home.
People these days have access to technology that makes it easier to communicate with the office. Fast broadband and webcams allow their faces to be seen at important meetings. We are surrounded by smartphones, laptops and tablets. Everything is surely there to free us from the daily commute, so why aren't more people working from home? What is teleworking? Also known as remote working, teleworking involves the use of technology to enable a person to work from home while maintaining contact with a central office. Figures show it's most common among older people, with one in five workers aged over 55 regularly working from home. A number of countries encourage it to help employees' work/life balance, but studies show teleworkers often work up to seven hours more each week at home than those in a regular office. The pressure not to be perceived as 'skiving' may drive those who work from home to exceed their hours.

There are signs that the number of people working from home is on the increase, though there is still reluctance to accept it. According to researchers, not 'being seen in the office' may affect a person's chances of promotion and result in a smaller pay rise than office-based peers.
This seems outdated to many. 'The best employers don't overlook staff because they aren't in the office. That strikes me as yesterday's way of working,' says a UK policy adviser.
Dame Stephanie Shirley, who pioneered homeworking in the computer industry in the early-1960s, says the concept has not taken off in quite the way many predicted at the time.
When she started her company in 1962, the idea of people working from home was alien to most businesses. Offices were highly regimented. Some of her company's programmers didn't even have home telephones. Workers were used to signing in and being closely supervised. 'It was about the number of hours you were present, rather than what you achieved,' says Dame Stephanie.
By the mid-1980s, the company was pioneering teleworking, employing 800 homeworkers and turning over nearly £20m a year. 'But social changes can take longer than expected,' says the 75-year-old.'Working from home still has its image problem.'

Passage B: Does flexible working work? This article explores the issues that surround flexible working arrangements. Luckily, many bosses are starting to realise that for some of us, no matter how early we rise, commuting to work can be a nightmare and arriving on time a distant dream. More and more of us are being allowed to work from home. The concept was trialled during the London Olympics, with companies quickly raving about the results. It seems that a large majority of us are actually more productive when we decide where and when we work. And yes, we can be better, more creative and efficient workers when we don't have to face the prospect of an early morning face-to-armpit encounter with a fellow commuter. It came as quite a shock then that a leading online company recently banned its employees from remote working, claiming that relationships with colleagues and productivity would suffer. 'To become the absolute best place to work, communication and collaboration will be important, so we need to be working face-to-face,' said a company-wide memo. 'That is why it is critical that we are all present in our offices. Some of the best decisions and insights come from hallway and cafeteria discussions, meeting new people, and unplanned team meetings. Speed and quality are often sacrificed when we work from home.' It wasn't long before reports of staff grumblings hit the web. Some staff who had accepted their jobs at the struggling tech firm based on the promise of flexible working were outraged. There have been no reports of mass walkouts but it is obvious that homeworking was a big attraction when the company hired its staff. Another online communications firm, which specialises in videoconferencing, has spoken about why the company concerned may have made a bad decision. 'It might backfire on them, especially if some of their workers have to travel for hours on end to get to their office,' a spokesperson said. 'With remote working, trust is important. Providing that employees and employers know that they can trust each other to do the job without being distracted, remote working could bring benefits to both. The fact that remote working allows for flexible hours could help firms hire people who might not otherwise be able to work to a rigid timetable.' And it is not just about travel and money, flexible working hours can prove invaluable. In a city that's open for business 24/7, working at different times of the day is possible from home, whereas in an office, opening times can restrict the amount of work done, even if there's a deadline that needs to be met. There are sizable savings to be made, for example from downsizing office space. For any modern firm, to deny the benefits of communicating via email, video calls or instant messenger would make little sense.

Read carefully the two passages in the Reading Booklet Insert and then answer Section 1, Question 1 on this Question Paper.

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

You would like to work from home rather than in the busy office of the global company where you are based at the moment.

Write a letter to your current employer to request an arrangement to work from home.

In your letter you should:

- address any concerns you feel your employer might have about the idea
- explain the advantages for both you and your employer of you working from home.

Give reasons and examples to support what you say.

You should use evidence from the two passages you have read to help you answer this question.

Remember to write the letter using your own words.

Write about 250 to 350 words.

Up to 15 marks are available for the content of your answer, and up to 25 marks for the quality of your writing.