

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Writing

Key messages

- In **Section 1** candidates are advised to familiarise themselves with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use them as a checklist. Responses which are awarded a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**, especially as there are sometimes two parts to a bullet point.
- Recognising where to use full stops instead of commas would improve the work of many candidates.
- The appropriate use of capital letters is essential.
- There is a concern that unnecessary violence/illegality of all sorts is present in a significant minority of narrative essays.

General comments

- The overall standard of the vast majority this year seemed to be on a par with previous years. There was some high quality writing and candidates generally coped well with the formal register and structure of **Section 1**. Even responses with weaker language skills were generally able to include components of a formal letter, including relevant common phrases and following the etiquette for addressing a Principal.
- Few candidates omitted a bullet point entirely although some reiterated content for Bullet 1, rather than suggesting specific improvements to bring to the School Council. Candidates are advised to ensure they address both parts of the bullet as required.
- Few candidates fell into Bands 7 and 8. There was some evidence of inappropriate language ('gonna', 'wanna', 'pissed') and some responses demonstrated limited knowledge of the English language.
- Time management for the vast majority was very good and there were very few examples of candidates not attempting a question or writing a short answer. Only a very few wrote a rough draft of their answers. Brief notes/plans were sometimes in evidence.
- Candidates should avoid the insertion of pre-learned idioms unless genuinely apt. Many candidates included elements which did not fit with the overall tone of answers, sometimes misusing the idioms/vocabulary as well, e.g. 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' and 'You can lead a horse to water but you cannot make it drink'.
- Paragraphing in **Section 1** continued to improve whereas verb and tense errors and the misuse or non-use of direct and indirect articles remain in need of improvement. Subject/verb/pronoun agreement was sometimes an issue. Candidates are advised to use direct speech sparingly as a way of varying the text and when doing so they should take care to punctuate it correctly, especially the use of speech marks. Sentence separation errors still gave cause for concern with commas used instead of full stops.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that their Principal wanted to form a School Council (a group of teachers and candidates) to discuss ways of improving school life for everyone. The candidate were asked to apply to be one of the candidates on this School Council. Candidates needed to write a letter to the Principal to say why they should be chosen, including the following bullet points:

- why they agree that a School Council is important
- a brief summary of their personal qualities and achievements **and** why they make them suitable for the position
- the improvements to school life they would like to suggest first **and** why.

This year, for **bullet point 1**, the vast majority of candidates were able to outline the benefits, often focusing on improved communication between candidates and staff. Some responses strayed into listing problems already in the school but were often able to link these to solutions which could be provided by the School Council. A minority of responses assumed that the School Council was already in existence and a very small minority confused council/counselling, leading to slight misunderstandings. Most candidates were able to give two or three reasons for its importance and thus were able to develop bullet point 1 sufficiently.

Most candidates were able to open their letters with appropriate politeness, often congratulating the Principal on their perspicacity and wisdom. Most were able to link their praise of the idea with the reasons for applying.

Bullet point 2 asked candidates to provide a brief summary of their personal qualities and achievements, and why they were suitable for the position. The first element of this bullet often led to long lists of sometimes unfeasible achievements, such as being national champions for many disparate activities. Stronger responses described achievements which would directly benefit the School Council, such as experience in a previous school, or membership of Debate Clubs. As with the personal qualities, responses often slipped into hyperbole which was inappropriate for the formal register of the letter. Stronger responses tempered their self-praise with self-deprecating humility, or offered to provide testimonials from others to support their case. The second part of this bullet was frequently given less attention, with some responses only implying their suitability via their descriptions of personal qualities. Stronger responses were careful to link the qualities overtly with the student's suitability. Some responses only gave achievements or personal qualities which limited their development of the bullet point.

Bullet point 3 asked candidates to offer some improvements to school life they would like to see first and why. A minority of responses offered only one improvement but this did not necessarily limit their response if it was fully described and reasons were given for it. Many weaker responses offered a long list of sometimes unfeasible improvements and then omitted to offer reasons for them. Most candidates were able to organise bullet point 3 using the format of 'suggestion plus reason', listing two or three improvements. Common suggestions were improvements to facilities, improved food, increased extra-curricular activities and upgrades to technology. Many candidates suggested more personal items such as addressing problems with bullying and work load. A small minority of candidates reprised bullet point 1 by suggesting a School Council as an improvement which could be made. Some responses seemed to assume that the School Council was already in existence and that the student had already been granted a place.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and candidates were clear about informing and persuading the Principal. Similarly, the **situation** was very well understood by the majority but some did not realise that the School Council had not yet been established. Almost all responses addressed the correct **audience** for this task, although some referred to the Principal in the third person. **The register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal and respectful by most, as was the **tone**, although one or two were a little too boastful of their achievements to be entirely formal in tone. Similarly, criticisms of the school were sometimes very strident which was not appropriate in a letter of application.

The vast majority of candidates used the correct **format**. Almost all used the correct opening, although a few substituted the name of their Principal. Date and address were often included and most finished with an appropriate valediction. There was a great variety of these and most were accepted as appropriate (e.g. Yours Respectfully, Your candidate).

A small minority chose to include aspects of a report and a very few started writing a letter but slowly changed into report format. Organisation hardly varied, with candidates adopting the logical approach of following the bullet points in the order given. As a result, there was a convincing move from the opening suggestion to the final conclusion. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1**. There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and virtually no examples of no response to the task.

Linguistically, most candidates found it quite straightforward to produce a convincing piece of work. Spelling was generally satisfactory. Paragraphing was also done well this year although there were some shorter pieces of text which were not paragraphed correctly. Candidates are advised to work on the correct use of capital letters (e.g. 'the principal' 'school council') and on use of tenses. In this task, as the student was

making suggestions, the use of 'could be beneficial' rather than 'can be beneficial' was appropriate. The word 'Principal' was sometimes written as 'Principle', which was unexpected as the word was in the question.

Creative Writing

Question 2

Describe how music affected you in different ways on two separate occasions. (Remember, as well as how it made you feel, you can describe the music itself and the atmosphere it created.)

The descriptive essay was not particularly popular with candidates this year and many of those who attempted this question offered simple narratives, often based around being at a celebration and then contrasting this with a sad event such as a funeral. Descriptions were often confined to details such as the artist and genre, rather than the feeling evoked. The vocabulary used to express how candidates felt rarely went beyond happy/excited and sad/tearful. Stronger responses to this question used imagery and comparisons to describe their experiences with music and the setting/atmosphere. Sadder occasions tended to produce stronger descriptions, with candidates able to vividly describe the emotional release provided by haunting and uplifting songs. Church music and religious experiences were often featured and candidates were able to clearly express how their faith was strengthened by particular music. The party approach was rarely successful, possibly because responses often devolved into descriptions of dancing, drinking and general social experiences, rather than describing how the music affected their mood.

Question 3

What will you look forward to and what will you miss when your schooldays are over? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was a popular question, possibly due to the familiar and relevant setting of schooldays. However, many responses were confused as to whether the candidates had left school or were still students, and difficulties with tense consistency increased the confusion. Many responses started with '*I will look forward to...*' but slipped into ambitious wish lists for careers and family lives, often swapping between future, conditional and present tenses, for example, '*I will look forward to attending university which could be useful in my career and I'm successful so my children look up to me*'.

Some responses did not include what they would miss, or added a brief list at the end. Those who wrote about what they would miss often confused tenses as they could not decide if the events were ongoing or already in the past. Many responses avoided verbs all together, offering lists of phrases e.g. 'My friends playing football, the terrible food in the canteen, my first girlfriend, the parties...', leading to run-on sentences which impeded clarity.

Stronger responses described both future and past events, often discussing the transition from childhood to adulthood and how this would affect their desires and memories.

Question 4

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'When the announcement was made, two people got up and left the room.'

As always the narrative titles proved to be the most popular and there were many candidates who opted for **Question 4**. The given sentence in the title of this question was well integrated into the narrative, with only a few examples of the sentence having little or no relevance. There were a few examples of the tense of the sentence being changed to make sense of what was being narrated. There was a wide range of subject matter. Many of the storylines relied on some kind of dispute, often involving property, elections or outcomes of competitions.

Many candidates avoided the violence which has been a feature of narratives in previous papers, although a minority included illegal elements such as sexual assaults, robberies and drug abuse. Whilst recognising that these themes may be handled competently, they often did not add depth to narratives and candidates are advised to avoid a reliance on 'shock value'. Some of the better responses to this question were often quite mundane situations such as prefect elections or school competitions which nevertheless were quite dramatic, with the required phrase often inserted to provide the denouement to their narratives.

Question 5

Clothes

This question was not a popular choice and few candidates attempted it. The majority of the responses to this question were straightforward factual pieces about types of clothing, the situations in which they would be worn and, often, some history of clothing with Adam and Eve being given as the start point. Weaker responses often simply listed clothing types. More successful responses focused on cultural clothing; often linked to special events and celebrations, or the world of clothing design.

Question 6

Write a story in which a diary plays an important part.

This question was very popular and most candidates made effective use of the diary as a device to provide evidence or solve a mystery. Some of the responses dealt with violence, with the diary often providing the evidence to bring the perpetrator(s) to justice. A large number of responses involved financial situations, such as corporate corruption or inheritances, and were often skilfully structured. Some candidates wrote about secrets being exposed which would cause embarrassment. These were often based around secret crushes and were set in school scenarios. With this question, and **Question 4**, candidates often started with very similar openings along the lines of '*I woke up that morning, with the birds sweetly singing*'. These often seemed memorised and the level of vocabulary/sentence construction in the opening paragraph was not often sustained throughout the piece. Whilst it may provide candidates with a 'security blanket', it is not advisable to attempt to customise a generic story in the hope that it can somehow be made to fit the question. Stronger responses were able to sustain style and tone throughout their narrative and provide a plausible series of events.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Writing

Key messages

- In **Section 1** candidates are advised to familiarise themselves with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use them as a checklist. Responses which are awarded a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- Attention should be given to the **full** requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**; often there is a word, such as **and**, in bold type, to indicate two parts to the bullet point.
- A word count by the candidate is not required. Also, time spent writing out the full wording of a question at the start of an essay could be better used for checking.
- Ensuring correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority of candidates.
- The difference between direct and indirect speech continues to give problems.
- Direct speech raises the level of a narrative but it needs to be carefully punctuated and paragraphed.
- The use of capital letters continues to cause problems; often candidates use them when not necessary while omitting them when they are essential.
- When given sentences need to be integrated into a narrative text they should form an important and integral part of the story and the given tense should remain the same.

General comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority this year seemed to be just about the same as in previous years. The very best candidates in this exam demonstrate a high level of ability. Equally, fewer and fewer candidates fall into Bands 7 and 8. However, there is still possibly an increasing sense of carelessness amongst some candidates, with the random use of capital letters, the lack of proper punctuation in titles and speech and inconsistent tenses. **Section 1** was done well by a large majority and Task Fulfilment was certainly done as well as, if not better, than in previous years. This year, in **Section 2**, all of the titles were attempted, with an increase in the numbers attempting the descriptive essay. The narratives continue to be the most popular choice. Time management for the vast majority was very good. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports. There was improved paragraphing again in the **Section 1** task this year. Sentence separation errors still give cause for concern.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that their school was hosting an event where adults who were successful in their careers would come to the school and discuss their success. Candidates, as senior students in the school, had to write a letter to an adult of their choice, inviting that person to come and give a talk. In general, the letters were enjoyable to read, appropriately constructed, and developed coherently as candidates responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. In **Section 1** candidates must accept the need to follow instructions and this year had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- an invitation to speak to students and the date and venue for the meeting
- what was admired about the personality and his or her work
- how the students would benefit from these visits.

This year, for **bullet point 1**, a simple addressing of the point gave an invitation, the date of the meeting and the name of a location, usually a school, where the meeting was to be held. Such thin details were enough to identify the meeting but candidates should always be prepared to elaborate within the 200–300 word limit.

More successful responses were able to frame the invitation within an explanation of this being an annual event (weaker responses relied almost entirely on lifting the general, opening sentence from the question as their invitation and this lacked the personal touch). Furthermore, for convincing detail, the venue included a particular part of the school such as a hall or auditorium, as well as directions to the venue, and the date was often linked to a relevant day in the school programme, such as Prize Giving or Music Day. Some responses gave *our school* for the venue and this was inadequate as the reader would not know where to go. Others did the same when suggesting the venue but backed it up by supplying an address to the letter which mentioned the school name. There were also a small number of instances where the adult was a former pupil and so in mentioning the venue it became less vital to mention a specific address. Overall, what was important was that the adult should know definitely where and when they were to attend because a good invitation would leave the recipient in no doubt – if candidates were not obliged to supply the school address at the head of the letter, they had to find a way, as above, to make the details clear. Weaker responses left out either the date or the venue (or sometimes both) because they became too caught up in the invitation.

Bullet point 2 asked for details of the candidate's admiration for both the personality and the successful work undertaken by that person. The adults invited were many and various. Many candidates took their lead from the question paper and chose a business person or someone working in television, often a local presenter or international film star. There were sports people, politicians and even a body builder and Miss Mauritius. These made it relatively easy to admire the work done by these people because they were high profile and their jobs understood by most candidates. Many candidates went beyond these fields and invited adults from the worlds of education, writing and campaigning, amongst others. The virtues of hard work, persistence, clever dealing and good acting were all admired. As far as personality was concerned, candidates admired the honesty, fairness, good appearance and sense of humour displayed by the successful adults. It was also obvious that a sense of charity towards those less fortunate and an admiration for women's rights were very prominent. Such adults were routinely referred to as role models for the students and most candidates wanted to follow in the footsteps of such people. The most successful responses in this bullet were those which said something specific about personality as well as work, or at least imply it very strongly. Less successful responses wrote a good deal about success at work but were sometimes not specific about the nature of the work or did not tie in any personal qualities to suggest this was a fully admired person they were inviting. The weakest responses were those which repeated non-specific phrases such as *I admire you a lot* and *I like the way you run your business* or who referred only to success in school careers rather than work. There were also candidates who made the mistake of writing too much narrative into their response to bullet 2, especially in an attempt to illustrate how the person had moved *from rags to riches*. Overall, this bullet proved to be the greatest discriminator for Task Fulfilment this year.

Bullet point 3 proved to be very straightforward for most. Whether they were talking about the specific visit from the one adult or the visits in general, all mentioned that a good talk would raise the level of ambition, motivate the students and lead to better exam success, although many candidates could have gone further and been more specific as to *how* this motivation would be seen. Some made the point that the visit was raising the profile of the school, especially when the visit was from the Minister of Education.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and **situation** and candidates were admirably clear about what they were doing in this text. The purpose was to invite an adult in a polite, informative and persuasive way. A very small number of candidates misread the scenario and reported to staff or students about a visit which had already taken place. Again, a small number wrote a general letter, usually within the school, advertising the fact that a meeting was going to take place. Such misreadings were few and most candidates scored strongly in this area. The proper **audience** for this task was the adult concerned and virtually everyone said this, although a very small number thought they were addressing the letter to a Principal or to the students. Quite a large number of candidates started their letter well, addressed to the correct individual, but then in **bullet 2** started talking about the person in the third person as if writing a report. The **register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal and polite by most. The vocabulary of the person's work terminology was a helpful addition when well used.

The correct **format** for a formal letter is clearly something that the candidates know and this was done well by the vast majority. A few candidates were too informal in their salutation and some made the mistake of providing an inappropriate valediction (*From; Regards*) and there were quite a number who did not provide the valediction and signature.

It is quite normal now to see candidates follow the structure provided by the bullet points for their organisation and the addition of a very short opening and closing paragraph is useful. There was some merging of material between **bullets 1** and **2** and this was understandable. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, formal **tone** and approach very well, although there were some examples of phrases which were inappropriate for the context, such as *you must come; you will*

come; you will speak and you are lucky to be chosen. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when the admiration was made clear in bullet 2.

There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and even fewer examples of no response to the task.

Linguistically, most candidates produced a convincing piece of work. Spelling was generally satisfactory. Paragraphing was also done very well. The use of capitals is becoming increasingly problematic. In this text, there was some weakness in the use of tenses when weaker responses referred to the work being done in the past whereas it was still ongoing and there was some confusion over the use of *will/would* in **Bullet 3,d** especially when talking about the benefits in the future. There was also a fairly widespread confusion of the singular and plural *work* and *works* and many cases where the word *works* was used instead of *actions* or *deeds* or *job*. Also, there was confusion between *old/ older* and *former* when referring to ex-pupils of the school and many candidates had difficulty with singular and plural in *work/works* and *student/students* – often this was a case of copying from the question paper as in the example of *career/careers* where candidates mentioned *your careers* when praising the adult because the word *careers* was plural in the question.

Section 2 Creative Writing

Question 2. Describe two different places which have special memories for you for different reasons. (Remember you are describing the atmosphere and your feelings, not just the places.)

This was not a very popular question. However, it was attempted successfully by a small number of candidates and produced some sensitive, touching recollections and some very good description by the most able. Essential to success in this task was the need to provide a strong contrast between two different places and memories. One of the very best essays contrasted a visit to perform in an auditorium at the age of six against the memory of playing with a sibling around an olive tree in a church garden. The former experience (*..the stage is wide and imposing..; ..I was terrified..*) taught the candidate about facing up to such an atmosphere (*..the audience applauded. And in that moment I knew I was where I belonged..*) while the latter experience taught the candidate about the enduring nature of a sister's love (*..we were astonished by its beauty and we both spotted what would link us forever..*). Most candidates were successful in remembering two locations, usually from their childhood, which they knew very well. A previous school or their grandparents' house or a play park or a beach proved to be favourite locations. They were remembered because they recreated their childhood and were mostly associated with feelings of security, friendship and family bonding. Thus, candidates spoke about spending the school holidays with grandparents or a family picnic at the beach. They described in great detail the particular characteristics of a room (a photograph or the aroma of home cooking) and so brought to life a defining time for them (*..From the terrace, you get a panoramic view of the sea and mountains..*). Some more mature candidates spoke about a place connected to a first boyfriend or girlfriend and the romance of that occasion. These essays in particular allowed candidates to reflect on the atmosphere and feelings associated with the occasion as well as the sense of place. While the overwhelming majority of candidates spoke about pleasant memories, there were a few who highlighted a particular location (there was one particularly good description of a lake) where the candidates sought peace and refuge during an unpleasant but unspecified time. There were also a few candidates who associated a particular location with very sad memories, like the break-up of a family and, while these were affecting to read, they provided a very good contrast with a location chosen for its happy memories. Some weak responses provided only one location. This did not invalidate the essay but made it difficult for the candidate to provide that real sense of difference which the title was encouraging. Weakest of all were those responses which narrated two outings, with little attention to the need for reflection or description. Linguistically, as always, those candidates who could evoke an atmosphere by close description and the use of the senses did well on this topic – *..we would spend whole hours lying in the shade of the mango trees and listen to the soft chirping and crooning of birds*. One account in particular made the reader feel that the senses were used to the full: on a mountain trek the candidate relished *the aloe plants and rare spices, as well as the smell of resin, wild flowers, rotten leaves and wild mangoes*. This was better than relying on words like *interesting, attractive, peaceful, and beautiful*. The word *mesmerising* was often used but sometimes without detail. Also significant was the fact that following the guidance in the brackets of the question helped a number of candidates to structure their response effectively.

Question 3. 'To save our towns and cities, people should use public transport more and their own cars less.c' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was quite a popular question and candidates were almost universally in favour of using public transport more, so as to save towns and cities. Most candidates argued quite strongly that the use of cars had brought

pollution, traffic jams and the likelihood of accidents to such an extent that it was now time to reverse the process. Of all the reasons it was the fear of noxious gases being put into the atmosphere by the burning of fossil fuels which most worried the candidates, especially as it brought with it the threat to a beautiful location. Of almost equal concern were noise pollution and the cost of personal transport, particularly if there was only the driver in the vehicle. In pursuit of fairness, many candidates were able to point out the merits of car ownership, including the convenience, the status and the pure excitement. Furthermore, cars were seen as more cost effective on longer journeys, especially when holidays were involved for the whole family. If public transport had faults, they were that it did not always run after a certain hour, the overcrowding and the lateness of buses. A good mixture of all of the above provided a balanced and thoughtful essay. Some candidates were of a similar opinion but only gave one side of the argument, concentrating purely on the merits of public transport and, while there was some merit in this intensity, it very often led to a shorter answer and repetition of ideas. Some candidates strayed from the topic and talked too much about pollution as an evil. Very few candidates felt that large scale car ownership was right or inevitable but they argued strongly that fewer cars would mean more public transport when there would be just as much pollution and more waiting at bus stops and being late for work or school. Paragraphs dedicated to separate considerations were well used by most. *Transport* was very often awkwardly rendered in the plural *transports* and there were many problems with the use of *fewer* and *less*.

Question 4. Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘Because the space was so small, it did not seem possible to get the vehicle through it.’

This was an extremely popular title as the given sentence was one which was easily integrated into the essay. In many responses the vehicle was the family car and it was being driven into a supermarket parking lot for a shopping trip. Better responses had stories about jumping into the family vehicle in an emergency, such as rushing someone to hospital or to school because they were late for an exam – many were caught in a traffic jam, took a shortcut and the result was unfortunate. When a generic term, such as ‘vehicle’ is used in the question, as it was here, candidates can explore more adventurous options and often more appropriate ones. The implication in the title was that the vehicle was large and the space too small. Examples of responses which captured this idea were a tank and a river crossing, or the Fed-Ex delivery driver, or the expedition truck having to go through a narrow gap in the mountains. Weaker responses made little or no attempt to integrate the given sentence into the story in any meaningful way so that, for example, the difficulty with parking the car at the supermarket was often just a minor irritation at the beginning of a story which was really about a robbery at the supermarket. Another weakness demonstrated by many candidates was in handling the idea of the vehicle driving ‘through’ a gap. Often candidates talked about *driving through the space* when they really meant *driving into the space*. In more adventurous stories, the impression was often spoiled when candidates spoke of *driving through the narrow road* when they meant *along the narrow road*. The best responses provided some very exciting stories with tension realistically created at the thought of a vehicle failing to get through a tight space, such as when a thoroughly spoilt young Porsche owner crashed his car while his parents were *outstation*. This sense of appropriate content was sometimes enhanced with humour: one essay spoke about some 18 year olds celebrating a birthday and who spent an hour doing a 15 minute journey, finishing up in a graveyard where they spent the night! Some candidates attempted to liven up the narrative by including dialogue (usually an argument about the narrowness of the gap) but increasingly it appears that candidates have difficulty in distinguishing between direct and indirect speech, both in its nature and its punctuation so that phrases like *The driver told that I am going to drive on..* were commonplace.

Question 5. Uniforms.

The majority of candidates who chose this title wrote a discursive essay. It is clearly a topic which inspires some controversy in every country but also produced a fair measure of agreement about the part played by uniforms in business, social and cultural life. Candidates were very largely in favour of uniforms and for many reasons. Whether they were in school, the forces or in business, uniforms were seen as instilling discipline and pride in the institution. They brought equality in schools so that poorer students were not disadvantaged. They made members of the police and armed forces instantly recognisable when this was an advantage and relieved school pupils of the need to find different clothes each day as well as saving their parents the need to provide the variety of clothes. Some stronger responses were able to talk about the way wearing uniform could shape attitudes, both on the part of the wearer (arrogance) or the observer (prejudice). One of the best essays was extremely wide-ranging and covered the army (different ranks), service personnel, companies, school students, hospital workers and still had time to consider slogans, design and brand image as well as a uniform as protection at work. Linguistically, a large number of candidates of all abilities had some trouble in distinguishing between the singular and plural of *uniform/uniforms*.

Question 6. Write a story in which a text message plays an important part.

This title was almost as popular as the other narrative, **Question 4**. Text messages are now an integral part of virtually everyone's life and there was no shortage of material for these stories. There were broadly two approaches – those which featured an emergency which necessitated a text message to save someone and those which had a text message sent by mistake to the wrong person or too late, with awkward results. A very small number wrote about the value of text messages in a discursive essay. The same qualities and weaknesses in Language that were evident in **Question 4** were apparent here. Increasingly obvious weaknesses of expression were the use of *threw* for *threw away*; and *proposed her*, instead of *proposed to her*.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21
Reading

Key messages

- Previous reports have highlighted the necessity for candidates to read both texts and questions with great care; this fact is worth repeating in relation to this Paper. In **Question 1(a)** and, thus, in **Question 1(b)**, for example, the rubric specifies which paragraphs are relevant to the summary question. Similarly, following the given heading of each answer box in **Question 1(a)** will ensure that appropriate material is included in the correct place.
- In **Question 1(a)** almost all candidates have learned that the use of bullet points to present the selected information is a practice which allows for clear, structured responses. However, there were instances where content points were spread over two bullets, with no obvious link. There needs to be a focus on making the *whole* point so that essential details are not omitted.
- Candidates had some difficulty when they were required to answer questions in their own words. In recasting the identified key word, candidates should not use its stem e.g. 'showcase' for 'show off' in **Question 5(c)**.
- Most candidates showed a good understanding of the summary passage, but some encountered problems in responding to the demands of certain comprehension questions. This was particularly so when trying to deal with questions on the writer's craft; attempts to decode images were often confused or occasionally avoided altogether. The best candidates, however, showed their skill here.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there were many noticeable attempts to use own words. However, candidates can improve on the problem of noun-verb agreement, suitable use of verb tenses, and the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or their intrusive use where none is required. Practice in the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' will ensure that these are used appropriately.

General comments

Questions were to be answered on two texts, and the variety offered by, first, a non-fiction passage and, second, a fiction passage seemed to cater for and engage all candidates. The variety of subject matter allowed for some questions which all were able to deal with and others which, being more challenging, differentiated between candidates and this was reflected in scores across the mark range.

The best candidates were aware of the types of questions likely to be asked. Even weaker candidates attempted all questions, despite sometimes not quite grasping the requirements, and very few omitted responses altogether.

The first passage, entitled *Chocolate*, explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second their ability to read for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, 15 of these being awarded for the selection of content points from the text of *Chocolate* and 5 marks for the ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested the candidates' ability to read for ideas by asking, first, whether 3 statements, based on information in the text, were true, false or could not, from the passage, be identified as either; and secondly, to recognise 2 opinions, distinguishing them from surrounding facts.

The second passage, *Aoife*, tested literal and inferential comprehension skills, the understanding of implied meaning and of wide-ranging vocabulary, the use of own words and the appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper were to be gained here. As suggested in 'Key Points', above, this was where the better candidates showed their skill in dealing with the more challenging questions of interpretation.

In **Question 1(a)** a good number of candidates achieved the maximum 15. Only a minority scored fewer than half marks. Occasionally candidates confused the contents of the two boxes and some scripts offered points split across two bullets. Where this occurred the mark could not be awarded.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some admirable responses from those who attempted to use original words and structures in a sustained manner. These summaries were secure in expression and showed real understanding of the text and the task. Others manipulated the text, managing to create their own syntax to gain high marks for use of English, if not scoring so well for use of own words. There were those who relied heavily on the words of the passage with very limited use of their own vocabulary, the weakest lifting whole blocks of text; the attempt to link these often proved unsuccessful in terms of sentence structure.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the stages in the development of chocolate and its uses in former times, and the benefits of chocolate and the reasons for its popularity today. The summary was based on paragraphs 2 to 7 of the text, with selected points to be written in note form. Candidates could use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because words or phrases essential to the point were missing, or because irrelevant material had been offered as a point e.g. material from the first paragraph, which focused on the manufacturing process rather than the gradual development of chocolate from its beginnings. Some responses were awarded the maximum 15 marks; the exercise was fully discriminating as a wide range of marks could be found, though very low scores were rare.

Excluding those provided, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 20 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15, for one mark each. Most candidates used either note form or short sentences; only a few responses offered long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point. While not specifically instructed to do so, most candidates used bullet points, in the way of the sample points given; this approach helped them to focus clearly on accurately presenting content points.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 referred to the stages in the development of chocolate and its uses in former times, and there were 11 points which the candidates could make. Of these, (and excluding the given first point) 3 could be found in Paragraph 2, outlining the first recorded uses of chocolate in former times: it played a part in cultural ceremonies (particularly in the Mayan civilisation) and was incorporated into the religion of the Aztecs, who also used it (or, more precisely, used the cocoa beans) as a form of currency. Most scripts offered all three of these points; occasionally there was unnecessary inclusion of the specific 'religious' story of the Aztec god who gave chocolate to humans.

In Paragraph 3, a further 5 points were available, focusing on chocolate's use, and the developments seen, when it spread to Europe from Central America. First was its arrival in Spain, or its introduction to the Spanish elite; there followed the addition of sugar in that country – clearly a valuable development to improve the flavour – and although this suggestion was not essential to score, many included it by way of explanation. The next point referred to chocolate, or the craze for it, spreading to other European countries; imprecise responses said that it spread *throughout* Europe, which was not the implication of 'other' countries. The fourth content point followed directly from the third, the majority attempting the fact that the Dutch, French and English created cocoa plantations in Central America. This point required mention of the three particular countries (or the term 'other European countries'); the crop had to be identified as 'cocoa' and the location as Central America. Attempts which omitted any of these requirements did not score. While 'America' was accepted as indicating a transition from Europe, those who referred to the plantations being in Central *Africa* did not gain the mark. The final point in Paragraph 3 was that engines, or machines, were invented (as a result of the Industrial Revolution in Europe) which speeded up the processing of chocolate. Those who mentioned only the invention of steam powered engines and not their impact on the development of chocolate did not make the point fully. Some made the point but split it between bullet points with no clear link, thus:

- *Stream powered engines were invented*
- *Chocolate was made more quickly*

If the second bullet had established a link between the points with words such 'These/this/which meant that chocolate was made more quickly', the mark would have been awarded.

The last 3 points for inclusion in the first box were found in Paragraph 4. The first of these was the invention of a press, which made chocolate cheaper to produce. Again, there were two essential elements here: the press, and the development it facilitated, which was not simply making chocolate cheaper, but cheaper *to produce*. A further development resulting from the invention of the press was the production of chocolate in solid form, or bars. If candidates did not mention the press, they could still be awarded the mark if there had been a reference to the press in an attempt at the previous point. The last content point of this paragraph was the invention of the process known as ‘conching’ and once again, to gain credit, candidates had to explain how this helped with the development of chocolate i.e. it gave it a rich taste *and* a smooth texture.

In the second section of the summary the rubric asked for the benefits of chocolate and the reasons for its continuing popularity today; the remaining 7 points which candidates could select were in Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7. Like the first, given point in the section, 3 of them concerned the health benefits of chocolate, most of which have not been scientifically confirmed and are only possible benefits, hence the text use of ... *may be...*, ...*thought to be...* and *research suggests that ...* However, candidates were awarded the mark if they used the more definite idea that, for example, ‘dark chocolate *reduces* cholesterol’, rather than that it ‘may’ do so.

The given point was often unnecessarily repeated. Following that given point, the 3 further health benefits were mentioned in Paragraph 5, the first being that chocolate is a source of ‘antioxidants’. This word was explained in the passage as things which reduce substances that cause damage to cells in the body. The mark could be scored for either use of the words ‘contains/has antioxidants’ or by giving the definition. Inaccurate copying of this definition sometimes wrongly suggested that it was chocolate itself which reduces such damage. Another creditable form of the point was that ‘eating chocolate works against cancer’, which is the suggested result of the presence of antioxidants in chocolate. These alternatives were sometime offered as three separate points, but could only earn a mark for one attempt. That dark chocolate may, or does, reduce cholesterol was almost always given correctly; it was necessary to specify that it is ‘dark’ chocolate which does so. The final point in this paragraph was that chocolate may boost thinking skills and/or cognitive function. It is worth noting, at this point, that when a passage contains scientific, medical or other specialist terms which may be very unfamiliar to them, candidates should not worry about repeating them, either here or in **Question 1(b)**. If it is clear that they understand from the passage that ‘antioxidants’ are found in chocolate, or that it boosts ‘cognitive function’, then they have shown the necessary comprehension of the text.

Paragraph 6 contained 2 points, concerning the benefits of chocolate to working people, which make it popular. The text says that 50 000 000 people worldwide depend on chocolate, or its production, for their livelihood. This lift scored the mark, but many reworded it as providing ‘many jobs’ or ‘jobs for many people’; either of these was acceptable, but the word ‘many’, or an equivalent, had to be included to suggest the vastness of the number. Many candidates unnecessarily offered both forms of the answer because they continued the lift into the example of the ‘many jobs’ provided particularly in the Ivory Coast; only one alternative form of the point could be credited. The second work-related point which accounts for an increase in chocolate’s popularity was that ‘Fairtrade chocolate ensures fair wages for workers.’ Many candidates did not mention by name the particular chocolate producer, which exists to overcome the poor treatment of chocolate workers; it was not enough to refer vaguely to an unidentified ‘international system’, as some did. Conversely, no mark was awarded for reference to Fairtrade boosting the popularity of chocolate without adding the ‘fair wages’ reason for that.

The two final points in this section were in Paragraph 7: that chocolates are given, or used, as presents, or as a sign or token of love, friendship or appreciation; and that chocolate has a symbolic role in religious festivals. The first of these points was usually made correctly. The second, despite being linked to the current symbolic use, today, of chocolate Easter eggs and chocolate ‘gelt’ coins for Hanukkah, was sometimes confused with the more ceremonial use of chocolate in the Mayan religion. Consequently, a muddled point sometimes appeared in the first box as a Christian or Jewish symbol or, in the second box, as a Mayan festival; neither scored.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, in which they were to state the stages in the development of chocolate and its uses in former times, and the benefits of chocolate and the reasons for its continuing popularity today, as outlined in the passage. They were told to write no more than 160 words, including the first 10 words, given as: ‘Chocolate was first prepared as a drink 2000 years ago...’

Almost every candidate completed the exercise within the given response page and short answers were extremely rare. Candidates generally linked the task set in **Question 1(a)**, of reading to seek out and note the most relevant information, to the writing of their summaries in **Question 1(b)**. If, however, their notes

included irrelevant material such as that found in the first paragraph, or unnecessary examples and repetitions, these were carried forward into their continuous summary. It is important, therefore, to practise recognition of only the most important ideas from the start of the Section. There were a few examples of responses which strayed from the details of the original text into candidates' own comments on the topic; this should be avoided as it is not acceptable under the rubric instruction to summarise the content of 'the passage'.

Showing competent use of their own words, the best responses re-phrased the text material in original ways, sometimes with fluency; other good responses edited and manipulated the text quite effectively. There were some clear attempts to offer a range of alternative vocabulary, while in other cases 'own words' meant interlacing the text with single words of their own. Occasionally, attempts to change the text vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original, as in: 'Chocolate *triggers* thinking skills' – 'boosts' means 'raises' or 'improves on', rather than 'starts off' the thinking skills, which is what 'triggers' suggests. Another inaccurate, single word replacement was 'famous' or 'well-known' for the text word 'popular'. It is a common misconception that these are synonymous. Something may be 'famous' without being 'popular', and vice versa. Over-ambitious attempts were sometimes evident, such as the following summary of the points about Fairtrade and giving chocolates as gifts: 'Fairtrade protection along with socialising functions showed positive improvement of relationships'; this made little or no sense.

Some candidates tried to refashion the syntax in original ways, and wrote fluently at times, but many more wrote in simple sentences or followed the structures of the original text. Often, compound structures were used, linking simple text sentences with 'and' or 'but'. These contrasting abilities were reflected in the range of marks given.

Linking words were sometimes used in an arbitrary or inaccurate way; 'However' and 'although' were used when what followed in no way contradicted or differed from the statement made e.g. 'The Aztecs associated chocolate with their gods. *However* the addition of sugar made chocolate popular'; and again, 'Chocolate was first prepared as a drink 2000 years ago *although* documents state that it was used as a drink in ceremonies.'

Other noticeable and frequent errors of English which further practice and wide reading will help to eliminate were as follows:

- The inclusion or omission of definite and indefinite articles e.g. 'Everything had to be done by the hand', 'Documents dating from 1500 years ago in a Mayan civilisation...' and, at the start of a sentence, 'a Chemist invented a press'.
- Noun/verb agreement, as in 'The **reasons** for its continuing popularity **is** that it has health benefits.' (Often, having suggested that several reasons would follow such a statement, candidates then offer only one, as above. More accurately, this could read: 'The reasons for its continuing popularity *include* its health benefits.' Other reasons might then be added in further sentences.)
- Inappropriate tense use e.g. '2000 years ago chocolate **plays** an important role...'
- Omission of capital letters at the start of sentences and for proper nouns, and their random use within sentences e.g. 'Chocolate spread to many **Nations**. **by** the sixteenth **Century**, **Chocolate** had reached **Spain**.'
- Use of the comma, where a full stop should have been used to separate sentences, as in: 'Drinking chocolate played an important part in cultural *ceremonies*, *the* Aztecs gained control of Central America' and 'It provides jobs for many *people*, *people* like giving chocolates as gifts.'

Question 2 and **Question 3** continued to test Reading for Ideas, and candidates could show their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it.

Question 2 asked candidates to decide whether each of three given statements from Paragraph 1 was true, false or not stated in the passage. While a good number were successful in all three cases, many ignored the instruction to use only the material in Paragraph 1 and said the first statement – that sugar is added to take away the bitter taste of chocolate – was true; however, this information did not appear until Paragraph 3 and so the answer should have been 'Not stated'. The second statement – that cocoa mass is the same as cocoa butter – was false, and there was much success here; the third – that white chocolate contains no cocoa solids – was true, and was recognised as such by almost everyone.

In **Question 3** candidates were to select and give two of the writer's opinions from Paragraph 1. The key to distinguishing an opinion from the surrounding facts is to recognise words or phrases which suggest a subjective view, rather than an objective truth. The first opinion – 'Chocolate is a delicious food' – would not necessarily be true for those people who prefer savoury foods to sweet ones and so we understood that this

was the writer's personal viewpoint. If candidates omitted the word 'food' or added the next few words about it being made from the cocoa tree's beans, they were not penalised as the opinion was clear within the whole; any further extension of the quoted words, however, went too far into factual detail of the chocolate-making process, becoming a statement, and some marks were lost because of this. The second opinion – 'White chocolate has the best taste' – was, similarly, the writer's personal view and not that of some who prefer dark or milk chocolate. Here, the addition of the preceding word ('Although') or the following words ('of all') did not detract from the answer. Candidates could use the text words or their own words, which some did, successfully. Very many candidates of all abilities got both marks in this question, though a popular wrong answer was that 'White chocolate is not real chocolate'. We are told that 'the purists' would take this statement as a proven fact (because it contains no cocoa solids) and so this could not be an opinion.

Section 2: Reading for Meaning

Most candidates seemed to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1, as is usually the case.

Question 4(a) was a very straightforward, literal comprehension question to begin this second section of the Paper, asking how Aoife, who couldn't read, felt about the printed word. This was usually answered correctly using the direct lift: 'The printed word was dangerous' or 'not to be trusted', or both. Any excess lifting would have denied the mark, but candidates all limited themselves correctly. Some gave answers which reflected what must have been her response to 'danger', suggesting that she was 'scared', 'suspicious' or 'unsure' – all good, thoughtful answers.

Question 4(b) asked how Aoife would get to her apartment if she were able to read. The passage clearly stated that 'She never took the elevator', and went on to describe the confusion she experienced with the signs in the lift, because of her inability to read. She therefore 'laboured' up the stairs, and most candidates rightly deduced that she would use the elevator if she could read. A common wrong answer was 'She would take the stairs.'

Question 4(c) was the first of the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words only the stronger candidates gained both the available marks. The key words to be recast were given in the question, highlighted with inverted commas: 'sickening suddenness', the two-word phrase which described how rapidly letters could change position for the dyslexic young woman, and the effect of that 'suddenness' on her. The easier mark was often awarded for substituting 'suddenness' with words like 'quickness', 'speed', and 'abruptly, or phrases such as 'in a flash', 'in the blink of an eye' and 'without warning'. Attempts to find synonyms for 'sickening' were less successful, the best being 'nauseating', 'making her feel ill', 'gut-wrenching', 'dreadful' or 'awful'. Too many candidates offered the key word 'sickening', or its stem e.g. 'She would get sick quickly'. Some repeated both key words, as in 'She got sickened suddenly'; this could score neither mark. Despite the clear identification of the key words, some candidates opted to recast the word 'shifted' and, though they suggested correct synonyms such as 'changed' and 'moved', these answers could not score either.

Question 4(d) required an explanation of how Aoife led a 'double life'. 'She could not read' and 'But nobody knew' were the abrupt statements given in the passage to explain how she led a 'double life'. Candidates needed to make clear the pretence or secrecy which Aoife had to maintain; they could do this in a variety of ways, and indeed a variety of ways were chosen. Some used own words to make clear their understanding of the situation: 'She pretended to be able to read when she couldn't'; 'She didn't tell anyone she had dyslexia and had to pretend she hadn't', and so on. Others used the words of the passage: 'She could not read. That was her own private truth.' The very best answers synthesised these two facts succinctly as in 'She kept her dyslexia a secret.' All these answers and more were worthy of the mark. Where responses did not score it was often because they mentioned only the fact that she could not read; others said that 'She didn't tell anyone her secret', but did not say what that secret was.

Question 4(e) asked: 'From which group of people...was Aoife most anxious to keep her secret?' The three 'groups' mentioned were 'her friends...her colleagues...her family.' The majority took into account the way the writer referred to the groups from whom she kept her secret: 'Not her friends, not her colleagues and *certainly* not her family'. However, a number of candidates, ignoring the fact that the question asked 'which *group*', in the singular, offered two or all of them.

A similar approach to that taken in the previous question was required in answering **Question 5(a)**. The second paragraph begins with the fact that Aoife had 'perfected a number of implausible excuses' to hide her problem and candidates were asked to identify the 'most' implausible of these. Just as the word 'certainly' flagged up the correct group to be identified in **Question 4(e)**, so the use of the first two words of 'or even

that her eyes were tired' was the clue which distinguished the 'most implausible' excuse from the other two (which were that she had forgotten her glasses or was short-sighted.) Very many lifted all three reasons and only the strongest candidates recognised the clue.

In **Question 5(b)**, candidates were asked what impression Aoife was trying to create by never shutting the menu 'too fast' when she was in a restaurant. The answer to this inferential question had to be deduced from where she was, as well as in the light of her reading problem; saying 'to pretend she could read' offered nothing more than we already knew. 'To ask a companion to order for her' appeared a number of times but did not answer the question, as this would have happened *after* she had shut the menu; the response should have dealt with why she did *not* shut the menu quickly. The impression she wanted to create was that she was reading 'the menu'/it', that she understood what was in the menu, or – and this was a thoughtful response from several candidates – that she was still deciding/choosing what to eat. With such answers, the strongest candidates showed an ability to understand both the character of Aoife and the exact demands of the question.

Question 5(c) was the second which required a response in the candidates' own words. They were to explain, in the context of asking others to read something to her, how Aoife recognised people who would help her. There were two pairs of words, either of which candidates might have chosen to recast: the first pair, 'cunning' and 'necessity', was rarely attempted; most chose 'happy' and 'show off'. Whichever words were selected, most candidates scored only one of the two available marks. The idea that she chose people 'with a *cunning* which came out of *necessity*' was understood by few candidates; they sometimes gained one mark by offering 'need' for 'necessity' but were unable to express that this 'need', or having 'no choice' or 'no alternative', required 'cunning' in Aoife i.e. that she had to be 'crafty', 'sly', or 'artful' in finding a helper. There was a greater measure of success for those who dealt with her recognition of people who were 'only too *happy* for a chance to *show off* how well they could read'. Most offered synonyms such as 'pleased', 'eager', 'joyful' or 'excited' for 'happy'; alternatively, they described the smugness implied by '*only too happy*' by saying they were 'proud' or 'more than willing' to show off their reading skills. The best candidates substituted 'show off' with 'display', 'demonstrate' or 'advertise'; some gave phrases such as 'to make an impression', 'to let people know', or even 'to wave in people's faces' how well they could read. A number used the stem of the key word e.g. 'showcase' or 'made a show of'; such reliance on the given word cannot be considered adequate as 'own' words. More candidates than usual recognised the key words but ignored the instruction to 'Explain in your own words...' and repeated them.

Candidates were asked, in **Question 5(d)**, what two things Aoife did, once she had asked someone to read a page for her, to pretend that she had read it herself. Responses were frequently correct, stating that she listened to the reader carefully, or with concentration, and that she remembered what had been read. A frequent error, however, was to offer 'listened carefully' and 'she concentrated' as two separate things, omitting that she then had to 'remember' the content. The words of the passage – that she 'opened up the part of her mind that remembered things' – was acceptable for the second part, even if candidates included the idea that, as she did so, she appeared 'slightly eccentric' or 'a little detached'; these additions did not detract from her 'remembering'. Several answers suggested that, having listened carefully, she 'repeated it back flawlessly'; this was the *result* of her having 'remembered' it, which was the important element. Other responses gained no marks because they went back to her 'casually passing a page' to someone and 'asking them to read it', rather than noting that the question asked what Aoife did *after* this.

Question 6 was another inferential question, asking what was suggested about Aoife's attitude to the famous Evelyn Nemetov when she was seen standing on the pavement 'as if she were just another member of the human race'. The subtlety of these words was understood by the stronger candidates, who rightly inferred that Aoife regarded her as someone very 'special' or 'extraordinary'; that she 'thought highly of her', 'adored', 'admired' or 'idolised' or 'was a fan of' her. Others expressed Aoife's attitude less intensely, saying that she saw Evelyn as 'more important than', 'better than' or 'superior to' other people, or that she was 'a role model'. Weaker candidates repeated the text adjective 'famous', often reworded as 'a celebrity' but such answers required modification such as '*more famous than anyone else*' to score. Many misunderstood the inference and thought Evelyn was literally seen as 'just the same as every human being', or as someone 'she didn't care about', 'didn't value' or, even, 'despised'.

Question 7(a) looked for a phrase of two words, to be quoted from later in paragraph 4, which conveyed a similar idea to that suggested by the words: 'It was difficult for Aoife to draw breath into her lungs'. The answer, 'suffocating panic', was found by very many candidates. Both words were required for the mark. The only completely wrong answer seen was 'undulating string'.

There were two questions which explored the writer's craft and **Question 7(b)** was the first. Quoting the fact that the letters in the contract looked to Aoife like 'lines of ants crawling over the page', it asked for two ways

in which this was an effective comparison. Many candidates found two or sometimes three ways in which it was effective: that the letters moved around like ants; that both were black; and that the letters, like ants, were small. The idea of their moving was the most frequently seen and the tiny size was usually the other comparison; their colour was noted less often, unless a candidate spotted all three. Some used the description which followed the quote: 'they clustered and rearranged themselves' and this was acceptable. Strictly speaking, it was the rearranging which signified movement as a 'cluster' can be static, and so while 'rearranged themselves' could score, 'clustered', alone, could not. Occasionally answers lifted the word 'crawling' e.g. 'They were both crawling'; that verb was too specific to the ants and needed to be something, like 'moved', 'rearranged' or 'changed position', which could apply to both ants and letters. Some answers moved on in the text, referring to moving like grasses, but this was a further image to be explored in the next question.

The second question on writer's craft was **Question 7(c)**, which quoted a new image of the letters on the page as being like 'grasses swaying in the wind'. Candidates had to explain how the letters appeared to Aoife at that moment. Some candidates offered more or less the same answer for two consecutive questions, **7(b)** and **7(c)**. Only the best candidates achieved all the marks. The comparison between the letters and swaying grasses required the idea of both shape and movement: grasses are long and thin; the 'columns' or 'vertical lines' of letters, or the letters 'going from top to bottom' or being on top of each other identified the similarity in shape well. Though not quite as precise in terms of individual letters, the simple use of 'long' and/or 'thin' was credited in this challenging question. There were various ways to compare the 'swaying' movement of grasses in the wind with the movement of the letters, and a variety of these were seen: they were 'waving', 'swinging', 'oscillating', moving 'from side to side', 'back and forth' or 'to and fro'. The best answers were succinct in expression, usually focusing on the letters, as the question indicated, but giving the similarities with the shape and movement of the grasses. e.g. (i) 'The letters were moving from side to side; (ii) They were in vertical columns, top to bottom'. The suggestion that the grasses 'began moving from horizontal lines going from left to right' was incorrect because it described only the movement of letters; grasses do not lie in horizontal lines and then move vertically. It was acceptable, however, to suggest that they were moving or swinging 'to and fro horizontally' i.e. a side to side, rather than an up and down movement.

In answer to both of the above questions, **Question 7(b)** and **Question 7(c)**, the weakest responses gave vague generalisations about the effectiveness of the images, with no attempt to decode them, as in: 'It is an effective comparison because it is a simile' or 'it is effective because it compares ants and crawling' or, again, 'It brings out a visual image of how the letters appeared to her'. None of these suggests an understanding of such figures of speech. A few candidates did not attempt these questions.

Question 8(a) was another straightforward literal comprehension question for which the majority gained the mark. It asked how, in lifting the contract, Aoife showed that she felt as if it 'radiated toxic material'. Many copied the passage: she 'lifted it with only the tips of her fingers' or added their own simile, without spoiling the correct action: 'She lifted it with only her fingertips as if it was red hot.' Those who did not score referred to her putting the contract into a folder but that, in itself, did not suggest her aversion to the document.

In **Question 8(b)** candidates had to recognise what was suggested about Aoife's plans by the single word 'Somehow', which ended the passage. It followed from her thought that, any day now, she would get the folder of unread papers down and deal with it – 'Somehow'. Many candidates took the view that she was optimistic and would learn to read or would get help from someone, with answers like: 'She would tackle the problem however long it took'; 'She would try and learn how to read'. Only a few candidates realised that her optimism was misplaced; that she had no realistic plans and was never going to be able to deal with the papers. The most perceptive responses took the whole passage into consideration and wrote 'It was never going to happen', 'She didn't know how she would deal with it' or 'she was unsure how she would carry out her plans'. Other possible responses could have focused on her continuing to hide her secret or to keep covering up her dyslexia. Weaker efforts all implied the possibility of a happy outcome, but 'that would be impossible', as one candidate rightly put it. Understanding the inference of the final word depended on the whole passage rather than the preceding sentence only.

Question 9 was the usual vocabulary question, candidates having to show their understanding, in context, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. Understanding being the key, accurate grammatical form was not insisted on. A good number of scripts scored the maximum 5 marks and 3 or 4 were very common. All words were attempted, accurate synonyms being seen most frequently for 'flawlessly', 'string' and 'badly'; the least popular choices were 'brimming' and 'eccentric'. For *brimming*, 'filling' or 'overflowing' were the best, but rarest, answers given. Common wrong answers were 'swimming', 'living', 'itching' and several instances of 'burning'. *Eccentric* was rarely attempted, and only a few of the candidates who tried to recast it were successful with 'weird' and 'unusual'; 'wild', 'familiar' and 'excited' were incorrect in the context. The next six

words were all selected frequently, and with a good measure of success in many cases. *Flawlessly* was very aptly substituted by candidates of all abilities with, for example 'perfectly', 'no mistakes', 'without error' and 'fluently'. 'Started' was a frequent and popular synonym for *struck up*, but 'developed', 'engaged in' and 'created' were some of those which did not convey the necessary sense of 'beginning'. *String* was almost invariably correct with the word 'line' or sometimes 'chain'; while 'a series', 'strand' or 'thread' were acceptable alternatives; 'a piece of thread' means something different and did not score. The same synonym was most commonly given for *crammed* as was valid for *brimming* i.e. 'full' or 'filled'; 'packed' and 'stuffed' were also suitable, as were 'crowded' and 'choked', but 'squashed' did not fit the context of 'paper' as it related, rather, to the letters. *Weighing up* was a very frequent choice, usually correctly recast as 'comparing'. 'Considering' also carried the essential idea of judging the pros and cons, as did 'evaluating' and 'assessing', though 'analysing' and 'thinking about' (both popular substitutes) did not. 'Desperately' and 'much' were seen most often for *badly*, very few attempts being incorrect except for occasional oddities such as 'no nice' or 'importantly' and the imprecise 'seriously' and 'urgently'.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Reading

Key messages

Candidates are advised to try to gain an overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions, before they begin to answer; this is especially important with reference to questions on the second passage. Closer reading of the whole text before attempting the questions would help to clarify the narrative described in the text. As in past years, many candidates showed a good understanding of the summary passage, but experienced more difficulty in responding to the detailed demands of the questions on the second passage. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail brought the best results.

Candidates might be encouraged to highlight/underline key words in the question, e.g. in **Question 1(a)** 'from paragraph **2**. Or in **Question 4(d)** 'which one aspect...' or pay closer attention to words already highlighted in the question.

Candidates should be discouraged from using unselective lifting. They need to be precise when lifting from the text to ensure that they answer the question.

Many candidates experienced difficulties with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words.

Answers in the final vocabulary question suggested the need for students to focus on the meaning of words in their context, as well as to work on vocabulary or dictionary exercises, and increase reading of both fiction and non-fiction material.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates can improve on the problem of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or intrusive use of the article where none is required. Work could be done on the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately.

Candidates are advised to practise recognising the difference between opinion and fact in the first, non-fiction passage. In general, there has been much improvement in candidates' ability over the years to answer such questions correctly, but further practice would lead to even greater improvement.

Candidates also need practice in recognising the effect of words and phrases as opposed to just their meaning.

General comments

Candidates had to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. As in previous sessions, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2.

All the candidates seemed to engage with the tasks and the texts. There were very few incomplete scripts, and in general candidates coped well with the layout of the answer booklets, with only occasional writing of answers outside the parameters of the spaces provided in the examination booklet.

In **Question 1(a)** there were few instances of irrelevant material from the first paragraph or of candidates adding their own views on, or knowledge of, the subject.

The vast majority of candidates put information into the correct boxes.

Generally, candidates made a good attempt at **Question 1(a)**, with many scoring full marks.

Some weaker responses confused line-fishing and fly-fishing, and trawling and the use of gill nets. This was also apparent in some summaries in **Question 1(b)**.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Fishing' and the second entitled 'Michael', seemed to engage the interest of the candidates and to stretch and discriminate amongst them. The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the text of 'Fishing' and 5 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to decide whether statements were true, false or not stated in the passage and to distinguish fact from opinion.

The second passage, 'Michael', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates had to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Many candidates made some attempt to use own words, although some relied on re-casting short phrases and individual words. Some attempts to use own words led to the inclusion of irrelevance or invented material. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length. Better responses were secure in expression and demonstrated a real understanding.

Both spelling and punctuation were generally good.

Comments on specific questions: Section 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify how fishing has been carried out through the ages, and the reasons for the decline in fish stocks, and the consequences of this decline, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on Paragraphs 2–8, and candidates were asked to write their answers in note form, where they could use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words or phrases were missing. Very few candidates used information from the first paragraph. Many candidates achieved the maximum 15. The exercise was fully discriminating as almost the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 18 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences lifted from the text; some responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points; however, most candidates used bullet points, as in the given sample points.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 referred to how fishing has been carried out through the ages, and there were 9 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 2 content points, (excluding the provided first point) about the fishing methods through the ages. Fishermen struck the surface of the sea to make frightened fish jump into nets. There was no insistence on 'the surface' nor on 'frightened' but if no reference was made to striking the sea, the mark could not be awarded. The second point in this paragraph was that fly fishing was a fishing method; alternatively, the point could be made by describing fly fishing, i.e. artificial bait in bright colours was used. Because of the insistence on detail in the first of these points, the second point was made more often than the first. Many candidates gave the information that harpoons were used to hunt swordfish; this was an extension of the given point that killing fish with spears was common in ancient times and was possibly offered by candidates because they did not realise that a harpoon was a type of spear. Another common irrelevance was reference to sea-gods and the three-pronged fishing spear.

In Paragraph 3, there were two fishing methods, the first of these was that a hook suspended on a line was used, and the second was that toxic or poisonous plants were used to induce torpor, or sleepiness, in fish. Many candidates made the first of these points; where the second of these points was not fully made, it tended to be because the reference to fish was omitted. Several candidates did not realise that 'hook suspended on a line' was the same as 'line-fishing.' There were a further 2 points in Paragraph 4. The use of gill-nets was another fishing method, as was trawling, or pulling a net behind the boat. Some candidates mentioned that trawling is criticised by environmental groups but, as the rubric asked only for fishing methods, this information was irrelevant.

A further three content points were in Paragraph 5: fish processing vessels were developed, nets made of synthetic fibre were invented, and fish farming was introduced. Reference to boats which get fish ready for sale before the boats land, or to boats which catch, clean, fillet, sort and freeze fish before the boats land, were alternative ways in which the point about fish processing vessels could be made; however, most candidates who attempted one of these versions of the point did not make it completely as they omitted reference to 'before the boat lands', a reference which did not need to accompany reference to fish processing vessels as the definition of these vessels means that they have the fish ready for sale before the boat lands. The point about fish farming could be made by giving its definition, namely that fish can be farmed in tanks or enclosures.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the reasons for the decline in fish stocks, and the consequences of this decline, as outlined in the passage. Paragraph 6 described the first element, namely the reasons for the decline in fish stocks and candidates could make 3 points (excluding the provided first point): overfishing takes place or, alternatively, supplies of certain fish began to die out because there were no rules about fishing them; some countries did not confine their fishing to their own shores or, alternatively, some countries fished off the shores of other countries; fishermen do not know the size of available fish stocks, or the number of fish which are in the sea. There was much success with the first two of these points, but some candidates wrote that fishermen did not know the size of the fish, which means something quite different.

Paragraphs 7 and 8 dealt with the second element of the rubric at this point, which was the consequences of this decline in fish stocks. There were 4 content points in Paragraph 7: defined fishing seasons are or were allocated; fishing quotas are or were introduced; authorities or governments pass or passed laws about fishing nets, fishermen are or were educated about dwindling resources. Where the first and fourth of these points were attempted but not fully made, it tended to be because 'fishing' was omitted with reference to seasons in the first point, or 'authorities' or 'governments' was omitted in the fourth of these points. The alternative 'fishermen are or were limited in the number of fish they can take or fish' was an acceptable alternative to the point about fishing quotas. Many candidates saw the reference to fishermen being forced to set off in dangerous weather as a content point, whereas it was because of fishing seasons that fishermen had to sometimes to set off in dangerous weather conditions, because they had no choice.

In Paragraph 8, there were a further two content points dealing with the consequences of the decline in fish stocks: the struggle for dwindling resources sometimes leads to violence, and there is a problem with pirate fishermen. Where the first of these points was not clearly made, it tended to be because the reason for the struggle – dwindling resources, or fish – was not made. Sometimes reference was made to violence – fishermen throwing fish at coast-guard vessels, or attacking fishermen from other countries – rather than the reason for the violence, namely the struggle over fish. The point about pirate fisherman could be made by mentioning that some fishermen fish without licences, or ignore fishing laws, so that a definition of a pirate fisherman was acceptable.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of how fishing has been carried out through the ages, and the reasons for the decline in fish stocks, and the consequences of this decline, as outlined in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

Many candidates used the wording of the passage, with a few minor word-substitutions or re-orderings. When this was done with care, most scored a reasonable mark for use of own words. A few particularly skilled candidates managed to use their own words successfully without misunderstanding, omissions or irrelevance, to score full marks.

A few candidates offered their own opinions on the topic, loosely stimulated by the original. Other examples of irrelevant material were the references to the sea-gods and the three-pronged fishing spear, and detailed explanations of the fly-fishing and line-fishing techniques.

Most candidates completed the task and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were some candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. The general use of own words for some candidates was noticeable, with these candidates being ambitious or original in their use of English. Many candidates moved blocks of text around rather than offering re-worded detail, or else they copied from the text. There were occasional examples where attempts at use of own words resulted in over-ambitious vocabulary which did not entirely match the meaning of the original. There were attempts to use connectives or adverbs with little understanding of the meaning.

The most common errors made in this question were:

- subject-verb agreement, e.g. 'global struggle result in violence'
- swapping tenses within a sentence
- connectives used awkwardly or inappropriately, e.g. 'continuing on' and 'after that.'
- 'although' misused (instead of 'however')
- wrong links, e.g. 'whereas' used incorrectly
- wrong use of prepositions
- missing definite or indefinite article (although this error was penalised only once) e.g. 'In second century...' and 'caught by using hook'
- intrusive definite or indefinite article (although this error was penalised only once)
- putting 'which' clauses too far away from the antecedent, e.g. laws about nets are passed by the government which has a big mesh size'
- incomplete sentences
- using a singular verb with 'people'
- 'fishermen' was often written as 'fisherman'
- confusion over 'strike' and 'struck' as well as over 'capture' 'captive' and 'captivate'

Although no check was being made on the number of content points in **Question 1(a)** against the number produced in **Question 1(b)**, if many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this was reflected in the language mark. Writing only, for example, 6 content points would be unlikely to be described as 'sustained' use of own words whereas, conversely, writing 15 content points might be sustained use of own words, though not necessarily. The best responses came from candidates who were competent and confident enough to reshape and recast the original text in original complex sentences. Such responses able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Question 2 and **Question 3** were the questions testing Assessment Objective 4 in the syllabus, i.e. Reading for Ideas, where candidates are being tested on their ability to respond to the ideas of the whole text or a section of it.

Question 2 was based on Paragraph 1, and asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements from the paragraph were either true or false or not stated in the passage. The first of these statements – that the first fishermen may have lived more than 40 000 years ago – was true, as the passage stated that fishing is an ancient practice dating back at least 40 000 years. The status of the second statement – that around 40 000 years ago people ate only fish – was considered to be ambiguous and accepted answers were either that the statement was false or that it was not stated in the passage. The third statement – that fishing was important in all early settlements – was false; the expression 'almost always' in the text suggested that many, but not all, people in early settlements ate fish. Very few candidates scored all the available marks here, with the third statement seeming more challenging than either or the others.

In **Question 3** candidates were to select and write down one of the writer's opinions from Paragraph 2 and one from Paragraph 3. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the words were 'fascinating' for the first opinion and 'cruel' for the second. These words supplied the opinion in Paragraph 2 that 'this account is fascinating' and in Paragraph 3 that 'line fishing is a (really) cruel method'. Although these were essentially the two opinions, candidates could preface the opinion from Paragraph 2 with 'a Greek historian of 2000 years ago wrote an account of hunting for swordfish using harpoons'. Similarly, in the opinion from Paragraph 3 candidates could include the extension into 'by which a fish... and then is pulled in on the line.' For the first opinion, reference to the sea gods' three-pronged fishing spear was a common wrong answer. For the second opinion, candidates often referred, incorrectly, to fish being an important part of the diet in North America. On occasion, candidates would incorrectly state that fishing with harpoons was fascinating *not* the account from the Greek historian.

Comments on specific questions: Section 2

Most candidates seemed to find this narrative text more challenging than the non-narrative Passage 1.

Question 4(a) was a literal comprehension question, and asked for the reason why Michael's decision to walk home in the heat was a mad one, the answer being that it was hot, or because of the heat. Writing that Michael was hot was also acceptable. Most candidates gave a correct answer, with the most common wrong answer being that the buses were stranded. Some candidates explained why he decided to walk home rather than why the decision was a 'mad' one.

Question 4(b) was an inferential question asking candidates how they thought Michael normally went home, and the context supported the correct answer that he normally went home by bus. Some candidates wrote, incorrectly, that he normally went home on foot. These responses explained how he got home on this occasion – on foot – rather than how he normally went home. Others focused on why he decided to walk, because the buses were stranded. There was misinterpretation by some candidates over the word 'how', which they read as 'what state of mind was he in?' with 'he normally went home tired' given as the answer.

Question 4(c) was a question on writer's craft, asking what effect the word 'toil' had that would not be achieved by 'walk', the correct answer being ideas such as 'effort' or 'difficulty' or 'struggle'. Common incorrect answers were that he was tired or that he walked slowly, or even that he walked quickly; these may have been true facts but did not show the effect of the word 'toil'.

The answer to **Question 4(d)**, which asked which one aspect of his job Michael disliked most, was that he disliked rushing out in the morning. On the assumption that school starts in the morning, an acceptable alternative answer was that he disliked rushing out to school in the morning. There was no insistence on 'out' so that 'rushing in the morning' was an acceptable answer, although its meaning is not quite the same as 'rushing out in the morning'. Many candidates spoiled a correct answer by copying lines 6–7: 'no more rushing out in the mornings'. Others did not gain the available mark because they omitted to write that the rushing took place in the morning. Popular incorrect answers were 'teaching' or 'marking'; more than that, if 'teaching' or 'marking' were added on to an otherwise answer, that invalidated the correct answer, as the question asked for 'one' aspect of his job.

Question 4(e) asked for the one way in which Michael's relief showed itself physically, the answer being that he was dizzy or faint, or that he had a dizzy sensation in his head. Many candidates wrote either that he felt happy or that he felt unburdened. These answers were incorrect as they were not physical responses. Other candidates spoiled an otherwise correct answer by adding either that he felt happy, or that he was unburdened, or both. The question asked not only for a physical way, but also only for one way, in which his relief showed itself physically. Other common incorrect answers were to offer 'enormous' or 'physical manifestation'. There were several answers of one word, e.g. 'manifested' and 'enormous', suggesting that some candidates might have misread 'one way' as 'one word'.

Question 5 was a literal comprehension question asking for the two things that Michael remembered about the park in previous summers. The key lay in reshaping the text at line 12: 'the park was no longer the undulating green he had always loved' and at line 14: 'the normally beautiful flowers beds', which gave the correct answers that he remembered the greenness, or the green grass, or the green trees, and that he remembered the beautiful, or full, flowerbeds in previous summers. Incorrect answers tended to be those which gave features of the park now rather than in the past, such as 'the grass was scorched brown' and/or 'the flowerbeds were empty and arid'. Some candidates repeated two different aspects of 'greenness': the 'undulating green' and the 'different shades of green' as their two separate answers, which allowed them to gain only one mark.

Question 6(a) was an inferential question which asked candidates why they thought Michael ‘switched his bulging briefcase to the other hand’. The most common error candidates made was to focus on Michael’s general condition (‘he was tired’) rather than the specific problem at that moment in time, that his hand was hurting from holding the heavy briefcase. The key to a correct answer here lay in the word ‘bulging’, which suggested heaviness or weight. Therefore, correct answers were those which stated that the bag was heavy or, by implication, because his hand was sore or hurting or tired. Incorrect answers were that Michael himself was tired or that his hand was sweating or sweaty, that he had to swat the bead of moisture from his upper lip, or drink water because he was thirsty, or to wave to his neighbours.

In **Question 6(b)** candidates were asked to explain exactly why Michael’s neighbours were out on the street, the answer being that they were collecting, or getting, water from the standpipe, or filling their containers from the standpipe; in the second alternative there was no need to mention water as the expression ‘filling containers’ suggested it had to be water. Many candidates omitted the reference to the standpipe and so their answers were considered incomplete. Many candidates offered the lift of ‘there was a queue at the water stand-pipe at the end of the street’; this did not answer the question and so was incorrect.

In **Question 6(c)**, candidates were asked to explain in their own words what the neighbours were doing when they ‘meandered listlessly’ across the pavement. This proved to be a challenging question with very few candidates gaining both available marks. The two key words were ‘meandered’ and ‘listlessly’. There was some limited success with the explanation of the idea of ‘listlessly’, with ‘tired’ or ‘exhausted’ being the most commonly offered correct answers. Incorrect contexts were overlooked, so that ‘they were tired’ was accepted as a correct answer even although the context suggested that the idea of ‘tired’ had to be linked to ‘meandered’. Candidates were not generally successful in their attempts to re-cast ‘meandered’, meaning wandered, or drifted, or snaked, or zigzagged. Many candidates wrote, incorrectly, that they were chatting to each other, or that they waved to Michael. Others attempted incorrect adjectives to define ‘listless’; they were angry, or impatient, or hot.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked which two things Michael liked about his house. This literal comprehension question was correctly answered by very many candidates; he and his wife had bought it with their own money, and it contained the two people most precious to him. Occasionally this mark was lost through omission of the superlative in ‘most precious’. On the assumption that these two people were his wife and child, writing that his wife and son lived there was an acceptable version of the answer. Where the question was answered incorrectly, it tended to be because candidates omitted a reference to the house containing his wife and child, or that they lived there. Occasionally candidates wrote, incorrectly, for the first limb of the answer that Michael had bought the house with his money, with no reference to his wife. The weakest responses occasionally suggested the things he liked most were ‘the gate’ or even ‘the television’, or the fact that he didn’t have to leave it for six weeks. Another common error was offering ‘his wife’ in one limb and ‘his son’ in the other.

Question 7(b) candidates were to identify a single word used later in paragraph 4 which continued the idea of ‘flotsam of bricks, miniature cars and pieces of jigsaw puzzles’, the answer being ‘debris’. Many candidates could not see a semantic link between ‘flotsam’ and ‘debris’, but nevertheless there was a reasonable degree of success here, with the most common incorrect answer being ‘assorted’. Other incorrect responses were ‘reclining’, ‘floor’, ‘bricks’ and ‘cartoons’.

Question 8(a) was another quotation question. Candidates were asked to identify the phrase of three words used in paragraph 5 which showed that Michael was surprised that his wife liked spending time in the attic, the answer being ‘of all people’. Many candidates found this challenging. The most common incorrect answer was ‘never had he’, but there several others such as ‘place of refuge’, ‘being commandeered by’, ‘notebooks and folders’ and ‘paper-strewn desk’. Some candidates altered the text to create their own phrase of three words, such as ‘blocked by ladder’.

In **Question 8(b)**, candidates were asked to explain the contrast between what Michael wanted the attic to contain and what in fact it did contain. This question was an alternative to the conventional own words question, in that candidates were asked not to copy from the passage rather than given, or having to find, two single words to re-cast. Individual words from the text were acceptable provided there was no verbatim copying of entire sections of the text. This meant that ‘train set’, ‘building bricks’, ‘shells or leaves’; could be re-cast by ‘toys’ or ‘games’, while ‘desk’ ‘notebooks’ and ‘folders’ could be re-cast by ‘study materials’ or ‘stationery’ or ‘what his wife needed for her studying’. The focus was on what the attic contained, and so to make the focus of the contrast two types of rooms, such as ‘playroom’ or ‘office’, was incorrect.

Question 9(a) was a literal comprehension question where candidates were asked for two pieces of evidence in paragraph 6, apart from the fact that Michael's wife had not told him she had enrolled for the college course, which suggested that communication with her was almost impossible. Many candidates gave as evidence that there was a new look of hostility in her eyes, or that she was hostile. The second piece of evidence was that she did not turn around when he came into the attic, or when she spoke to him, or that she continued to work when he came into the attic. It was necessary to refer to both Michael and his wife to capture the idea that lack of communication involved both husband and wife in some way. Some candidates offered the fact that she had not told him she had enrolled for the college course, but that evidence was part of the question wording and so could not be the answer. Others wrote, incorrectly, that he had been thinking for a long time of a way to tell her he was happy to support her in her learning, but that was considered insufficient evidence for lack of communication, as there might have been other reasons why he had not been able to tell her, for example absence from home or busyness at work.

Question 9(b) was an inferential question which asked why Michael's wife appeared gradually 'from the feet up'. This could be answered by writing that he was climbing a ladder, or moving upwards towards her. Many candidates produced confusing answers here, with common incorrect ones being 'she was studying', and 'she was lying on the desk' or 'she was practising yoga'.

Question 10 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or phrases from a choice of eight. There were varying degrees of success here but, in general, answers showed the need for candidates to work on vocabulary building and to think about words in the context in which they are used. The most frequent correct answer was 'without stress', 'without worry' or 'relieved' for 'unburdened', and '(place of) security', '(place to) relax' and '(place of) safety' for 'refuge', (but not 'place to stay' or 'place to hide'). Some candidates were confused here with 'refugee', showing the need to look at the word in its context. There was much success with 'release', 'emit' or 'let out' for 'exude'. Most candidates who attempted 'labyrinth' scored the mark for the synonym 'maze', or phrases such as 'confusing path' or 'complicated place'. For 'fringed' a mark could be scored for 'surrounded', 'bordered' or 'edged', although this was not a popular choice of word to re-cast; where it was selected, 'covered' was a common incorrect answer. Few candidates attempted 'bead'; acceptable synonyms for this were 'drop', 'spot' or 'ball'. Synonyms for 'picked his way' were 'manoeuvred' or 'negotiated', or phrases such as 'walked carefully'; or 'walked with difficulty'; there were many answers here which were incorrect because the word 'way' had been repeated, such as 'chose his way'. 'Involuntarily' caused some difficulty for most of candidates who attempted it, thinking that when the word refers to a person it means 'unwillingly' or 'without thinking'. But in this context, it was linked to the noun 'joy' which, as an emotion and not a person, cannot do things unwillingly or without thinking. Correct synonyms were words such as 'spontaneously', 'instinctively' or 'automatically'.

The full range of marks was seen here, although there were very few instances of all five marks being scored and several cases of no mark being gained. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, there was no insistence on correct grammatical form.