

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Composition

Key Messages:

- It is essential to read the question carefully and follow all the instructions given.
- In **Section 1** carefully consider purpose, situation and audience when planning a response.
- In **Section 1** it is important to develop the bullet points as evenly as possible and ensure that all required information is included.
- Avoid joining individual words together, such as 'atleast' or 'eventhough'.
- Consider all the titles in Section 2 before deciding on a topic.
- Direct speech is useful in developing characters and plot, but must be punctuated properly with correct use of paragraphs.
- Care should be taken to use of capital letters appropriately.
- Concentration on correct tenses and agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.

General Comments:

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. **Section 1** was done well by most candidates but some underestimated the demands of the question. There was a spread of responses in **Section 2**, although the narrative questions were generally more popular than the others and this is a sensible approach for many candidates who are more comfortable writing narratives. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements, all of which demonstrated how well they had been prepared. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. Very few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. There were very few instances of prepared essays, although occasionally a candidate found it challenging to include a prescribed sentence in a natural way. There were a few examples of the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna', which can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided. There were some examples of unnecessarily offensive language, or content designed to shock, in Section 2: candidates are reminded that this is never appropriate, even in direct speech.

Comments on specific questions:

Section 1

In the Directed Writing task equal marks are given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write a letter to a local newspaper editor to outline their community's views on a plan to build a new road in their area. The plan for the road had received both positive and negative reactions. Their own view of the plans was positive, but they had to outline reasons for positive and negative reactions from other people in their community before suggesting changes that could be made to the plans in order to please everyone. Although the letter was addressed to the newspaper editor, the potential audience also included members of the wider community who may read the letter in the newspaper. This was a scenario that was within the imagined experience of the candidates, the majority of whom responded well to the task. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

Section 1 is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing a formal letter for the specified audience, the editor and readers of a local newspaper, in addition to the content of the letter. Candidates were also instructed that they were *sympathetic* to both viewpoints, although agreed with the majority of people who were in favour of the plans. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:



- why most people like the plan for the new road
- why other people object to it
- what changes to the plan could be made to satisfy those who do not like it.

In the first bullet point it was essential to mention a number of potential benefits of the new road, firmly linked to the people in favour. In the second bullet point they were expected to offer some credible objections that could be raised by local people and in the third bullet point there were opportunities to develop ideas of how the plans could be modified or adapted to allay people's concerns and bring the community together. Therefore all three bullet points offered scope to develop ideas and explanations.

The descriptors for **Task Fulfilment** in the syllabus make it clear that candidates will be judged on:

- clear understanding of purpose, situation and audience
- a correct format for the piece of writing
- appropriate tone and register
- the use of information to justify opinion
- the sensible development and organisation of the bullet points.

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned, the highest marks were awarded to responses which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the letter and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. Few candidates misunderstood the situation, although a small minority thought that the road had already been built. This limited the scope for developing relevant content at times.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. The first bullet point did not pose problems for the majority of candidates, who offered a good range of benefits that would stem from the building of a new road. Many candidates focused on rural locations and referred to current difficulties with dusty roads, potholes and poor transport links. They outlined how the building of a new road would improve infrastructure and the benefits of the economic developments that would follow. Many candidates also considered how a new road would improve the lives of those living and working in the community by attracting businesses and new bus routes to get to places of work. The second bullet point was usually explained fully; many candidates demonstrated excellent knowledge about the potential hazards of a major highway development, citing pollution and noise as nuisances that local people objected to. They also considered how agricultural land may be taken for the road and the effects on people who relied on the land to earn income. Some candidates referred to people's houses being demolished for the development and their despair at being uprooted. A few candidates mentioned local people's fears that with modernisation, traditional ways of life would be lost, and there could be increased crime as a result of better road links to big cities. The third bullet point was sometimes less developed than the first two, with some responses repeating points made for bullet 2 with a weak or unrealistic solution offered, for example, completely moving the site of the road to stop land being taken from people. Some responses mentioned the importance of listening to the people who objected to the new road. The more successful responses built on the ideas offered for bullet 2, developing plausible solutions and compromises, while acknowledging the need for compromise on both sides.

The stronger responses usually amplified all three bullet points, using relevant and imaginative ideas to develop the response. Other responses offered a limited number of ideas and needed to incorporate more detail in all three bullet points. The bullet points do not always have to be given equal treatment but it is also true that the answer should not be too unbalanced because otherwise a bullet point might not be adequately developed.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and most candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing a letter to a newspaper editor. However, some candidates slightly misunderstood the purpose and assumed that the editor had the power to make unilateral decisions about the building of the road, rather than the newspaper being a vehicle to express views publically. The register was kept suitably formal and polite in the vast majority of responses. The best responses were able to balance the views of both sections of the community, while explaining their personal reasons for agreeing with the plan. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate format for a letter to a newspaper editor, opening with the salutation specified in the task and ending their letter using an appropriate valediction. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to communicate effectively.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite and formal tone very well. Some responses were rather short. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were generally at ease with vocabulary associated with a building development. Most candidates found little difficulty in addressing the task to produce a convincing piece of work.

Section 2

Question 2

Describe a long wait you had at a railway station or bus station. (Remember to describe the people, the surroundings and the atmosphere, as well as your feelings.)

This was a reasonably popular title. The vast majority of candidates described a wait at a railway station, although a few focused on waiting for a bus. The best responses were able to capture the atmosphere of the setting through using sights, sounds and smells. Many included vivid descriptions that made it possible for the reader to imagine the places being described. Some were also very entertaining, especially those which described their various fellow travellers, and their impatience to get started on their journey. Some described the highs and lows of being told their train or bus was about to depart and then the feelings of disappointment when they were let down and faced with an even longer delay. At times responses became rather like narratives, focusing on their destination and reasons for travelling there. This often resulted in a lack of focus on description.

Question 3

Who do you think does the more important job, a teacher or a nurse? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was a popular title and proved to be an attractive topic for candidates of all abilities. It was often approached by candidates who had interesting ideas and opinions on the subject. Most expressed great respect for both jobs and offered detailed descriptions of the duties carried out in both roles. Sometimes this resulted in rather descriptive responses, which did not focus sufficiently on expressing a clear viewpoint. Some candidates took a very balanced view and argued that both roles were equally important. Many responses focused on the roles of teachers in their own lives and the impact that they have on young people's lives and society in general. These candidates often argued that although a nurse's job carries responsibilities, it does not have the wider impact on society achieved by teachers. Other responses focused on the unpleasant duties nurses often have to attend to and argued that there can be nothing more important than saving lives and caring for desperately ill people. Many candidates were well informed about both jobs and the duties carried out by nurses and teachers, exploring their ideas with convincing evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view.

Question 4

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'We had never been in such trouble before.'

This was a very popular title. Favourite themes included attending parties, or going out, without parental permission and ending up in trouble due to alcohol or drugs. Another popular theme was a school setting where rules were broken and the miscreants caught. In most responses the main protagonists were acting out of character, often due to peer pressure, which offered an interesting perspective for the narrative. The best essays were those that built up to the prescribed sentence effectively and developed the situation convincingly. There were some really thoughtful and well developed plots involving deceit and foolish behaviour, often resulting in feelings of guilt or shame when those involved were discovered and had to face the wrath of their parents or teachers. Such responses focused on building up suspense for the reader. Less successful responses included the required sentence in their narrative, but did not really explore the potential in terms of the plot. Sometimes the situations were rather contrived, or unconvincing, and lacked the dramatic development necessary for the prescribed sentence to work effectively.

Question 5

Festivals.

This was a less popular topic inviting a small number of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. The interpretation of festivals varied widely, with some candidates focusing on religious and cultural festivals and others referring to large music events. The best responses either treated it as a reflective title exploring their own experience of festivals and their importance in people's lives, or an informative response describing the different festivals celebrated around the world. Many responses considered the importance of festivals in maintaining cultural and religious traditions and in developing respect for the beliefs and traditions of others. Weaker responses found little to say on the topic and tried to define and explore the importance of festivals with little prior knowledge or understanding, often resulting in rather repetitive and unconvincing responses.

Question 6

Write a story about someone who went on a journey to keep a promise.

This was a less popular title, perhaps because candidates had already seen an attractive title before reaching Question 6. Many stories focused on romantic journeys, where a promise made years earlier had to be fulfilled, often with rather tragic outcomes due to the other person moving on with their life, or being on their deathbed when the journey is finally completed. Stronger responses fully explored thoughts and feelings of anticipation and excitement during a long and often arduous journey, with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama and tension. Some responses explored interesting family situations where a conflict resulted in long term separation and involved huge distances, and examined a range of complex feelings and attitudes. Less successful responses were wholly narrative, focusing on describing a long journey, but not developing the thoughts and feelings of the characters.

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 it as a checklist. Even where candidates receive 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 where there is a word in bold type.
- Candidates should ensure that they have understood the purpose, audience and situation in **Section 1** so as not to contradict what is given in the task.
- Candidates to provide word counts. Also, writing out the full wording of a question at the start of an essay is unnecessary.
- Ensuring correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority candidates.
- Direct speech raises the level of a narrative but it needs to be carefully punctuated and paragraphed.
- The random use of link words and sentence openings such as *Moreover* and *Furthermore* should be avoided. Candidates are advised to consider if they are using such words correctly.
- Appropriate use of capital letters is essential.
- Great care should be taken in the use of prepositions, especially when *at* is used instead of *to* as in *I will go at school*. *In* and *into* are also often confused, as in *He walked in my room* which has a very different meaning from *He walked into my room*.

General comments:

- The overall standard of the vast majority was comparable to previous years. The very best candidates in this exam demonstrate an ability which belies the fact that most are writing in a second language. However, there was an increase in the use of slang language, inconsistent use of capital letters and lack of proper punctuation in titles and speech. **Section 1** was done well by a large majority although there were many examples of inadequate attention given to two of the bullets. This year, in **Section 2**, all of the titles were attempted but **Question 4** proved much more popular than is usual for any one title. 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 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 they had become aware of a person in their area who gave help to members of the community who needed it. Few people knew about this good work and so the candidates were asked to write a letter to the local newspaper highlighting the good work that was being done. Candidates had a wide choice of good work to choose from and the overwhelming majority of them responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. **Section 1** is directed writing and so has more of a reading element than **Section 2**. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to the instructions and to ensure that their responses follow them. This year candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- details about the person **and** where the good work was done
- a description of the good work and how it benefitted the community
- suggestions about how the newspaper readers could become involved in the good work.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas, or responses to the bullet points, that will gain most marks. There is a big difference between mentioning the bullet point and elaborating on it. This year, for **bullet point 1**, a simple addressing of the point gave the name of the person doing the good work and the name of a location, usually a town or building, where the work was carried out. Such details were enough to identify the person but candidates should always be prepared to elaborate within the 200–300 word limit. More successful responses were prepared to name the person and add some relevant detail such as his or her profession, the job that the person held, some idea about how wealthy he or she was and/or details about the person's family. For the location, most candidates mentioned a town or city as their area; more detailed responses went on to describe the village hall or community centre, local streets or similar venue. Some candidates referred to *my area* but supported it by supplying an address to the letter which mentioned the area. Weaker responses were reluctant to name the person involved (possibly responding a little too strongly to the element of secrecy in the scenario) but this was a pity as the name of the person would be essential in highlighting the good work and might well be needed to make sense of **bullet 3**. Some candidates also relied on locations such as *in his house* or *next door to me* or *in my area* which remained too vague if an address was not included in the letter. A small number mistakenly wrote about themselves as the provider of the good work; this contradicted the wording of the scenario.

Bullet point 2 asked for a description of the good work and the benefits it brought to the community. The responses were extremely varied and ranged from donating money to giving shelter to homeless people. Some more extravagant gestures of help involved building dwellings, rebuilding broken bridges, laying on a water supply and taking on the government over the issue of faulty roads and transport systems. Some people were truly superheroes in that they did several of these, at the same time as running a successful business and coping with their own family. Most candidates went on to detail the benefits to the community, such as greater co-operation, improved financial and living conditions and upgraded infrastructure in the area. Most of these benefits were self-evident and many candidates did not labour the point but left the benefits as implied; in such an obvious situation, this was perfectly acceptable. Some candidates talked about the person working with a group of others which rather contradicted the idea of the work being largely unknown. *Work* was sometimes misinterpreted as a *job*.

Bullet point 3 proved to be the most challenging for candidates and thus was a discriminator. The bullet was aimed at newspaper readers and those candidates who interpreted it well encouraged the readers to donate money to the person, give their time to help the person or perhaps contribute some building materials and clothes, depending on the circumstances of those being helped. Some candidates suggested that readers could visit the person and express their gratitude that such work was being done. Some responses suggested that readers could set up similar charitable ventures at other locations and so emulate the person and thus lead to the improvement of society. Others encouraged readers to follow the example and thereby become more charitable in a general way. The weakest acceptable response here was merely that readers should read the newspaper article and become aware, without any suggestion of a more practical outcome. Some candidates confused the newspaper editor with the newspaper readers as the target for this bullet point and expected the former to be able to bring about unrealistic changes in the community; also, the editor was often expected to hold a party to celebrate the person's achievements. A significant number went further and expected the editor to alter or improve difficult social situations.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and **situation** and candidates were clear about what they were doing in their responses. The purpose was to inform both the editor and the newspaper readers in a polite way and make them aware of a situation. A very small number of candidates misread the scenario and set the events in the future rather than reporting on what had happened already so that it was as if the good work was being planned and the readers were being urged to join in with the effort. This made it extremely difficult to answer **bullet 2** because they could only guess at what the benefits might be. A small, number of candidates missed the point that the person's work was largely unknown before this letter to the newspaper and said that the person was loved by everyone for the work and one response referred to a website advertising what they did. The correct **audience** for this task was the editor and virtually everyone said this, although a very small number thought they were addressing the letter directly to the newspaper readers, rather than just mentioning them in **bullet 3**. In line with speaking to an adult on a serious matter, the **register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal by most. The vocabulary of charity work terminology was a helpful addition when used appropriately.

It is important to stress at this point that, although a number of weaknesses have been identified so far in purpose, situation, tone/register, these were relatively few in number and the task as a whole was well done by most candidates. The correct **format** for a formal letter provided very many candidates with an excellent opportunity to display their understanding of such a text. Few candidates made the mistake of providing an inappropriate valediction (*From; Regards*) but a significant number forgot to provide the valediction and signature altogether. There were relatively few examples of candidates writing reports or a newspaper article.

There was little variation in organisation, with candidates logically and sensibly following the bullet points in the order given. 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. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullet 3 was answered fully. There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and even fewer instances where there was no attempt at the task.

Linguistically, most candidates found it quite straightforward to produce a convincing piece of work. Spelling was generally satisfactory. Paragraphing was also done very well indeed this year. On the other hand, candidates seem now to struggle to see capital letters as important. Candidates are advised to consider how this affects the proper format or style of a text. In this text, there was some weakness in the use of tenses when some responses referred to the work being done in the past whereas it was still ongoing. 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*. *Awared, alot* instead of *a lot* and *a good work* were also rather awkward phrases which, with a little more checking, could have been corrected. Finally, there was too much straight lifting of the wording of the question when forming the introductory paragraph.

Section 2 Creative Writing

2 Contrast the scene and the atmosphere in a shop that you like to visit and in one you do not like. (Remember you are describing the atmosphere, the surroundings and the people, not just what is happening.)

This was not a very popular question but it was attempted successfully by a small number of candidates and it was clear from these that shopping was of considerable interest to them. At the heart of the question was the need to provide a strong contrast between two premises. One of the very best responses contrasted a sparkling and bustling toy emporium with a welcoming atmosphere against a gloomy corridor with decaying joke items and rotting food, complete with a grotesque owner who was more interested in playing online games than attending to customers.

Most candidates were successful in locating two premises of which they had considerable knowledge and for this reason nearly all examples were shops in the immediate vicinity of the candidate's dwelling. Therefore, small, often family-run, businesses were most often written about and it was very clear from all responses that the same advantages and disadvantages were common to all. Shops were valued if they had plentiful stock and if they were well arranged and kept tidy. Shops which were light and airy and also spacious (even relatively so in a small shop) were clear favourites.

Most important of all to everyone was the quality of service given by the shop. Shopkeepers and works were universally praised for courteous behaviour and their knowledge of what they were selling. It was suggested very strongly that a pleasant greeting and time to help made the shopping experience better. On the other hand, things like strong smells in a meat or fish shop devalued the shopping experience and made it simply a chore. There were a considerable number of examples of rude behaviour and poorly maintained shops recounted by some candidates.

A small number of candidates wrote about a shopping mall in a bigger town or city rather than just a shop and this was perfectly acceptable. Less acceptable was the occasional example of responses which missed out on the sense of contrast by referring to only one shop.

Linguistically, those candidates who could evoke an atmosphere by close description and the use of the senses did well on this topic. Also significant was the fact that following the guidance in the brackets of the question helped a number of candidates to structure their responses effectively.

3 Do you think it is possible for celebrities to have private lives? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This question was more popular than the argument question usually is. Candidates' use of social media informed them about celebrities' lives and responses demonstrated an awareness of the advantages and disadvantages of fame. Most responses argued quite strongly that celebrities deserve a private life, while acknowledging that celebrities invited publicity and were themselves responsible for their lack of privacy. Most examples came from the world of popular music, film and television, sport and the more recent social media sites.

Most arguments understood that celebrities have to walk a tightrope between fame and privacy and that they have to make an extra effort to ensure that they had some time to themselves, and especially for their families. Candidates were very sympathetic towards the celebrities and their plight and were actually quite strident in their condemnation of newspapers and the paparazzi for their intrusion into people's private lives, especially when it led to injury or even death (Lady Diana). The best responses supplied many illustrations which gave weight to the points being listed: weaker responses, on the other hand, with very little to say about the argument, provided biographies of their favourite stars.

Paragraphing was generally good. Agreement problems were a feature of many answers – hovering between 'celebrities'/'a celebrity' and 'private life'/'private lives'. Generally, weaker candidates are advised to avoid this type of essay as their argumentative and linguistic skills may not allow them to adequately respond to the task.

4 Write a story which includes the sentence: 'I realised only at the last minute that I had forgotten something important.'

This title was easily the most popular one this year as most candidates could identify with the predicament. Candidates are increasingly adept at integrating the given sentence into their narrative without making it sound like an awkward addition.

There were a number of favourite themes for these stories. Amongst the most popular was the story about the candidate who was booked on a flight and needed to get to the airport in a hurry. This led to forgetting a passport which caused great panic until a relative made a rapid car journey home in order to get the passport to the airport just in time. Other equally popular scenarios were forgetting an identity card when turning up for an examination or forgetting a file/memory stick before a presentation or an interview. Also, many candidates had been entrusted with providing the cake or present for a birthday celebration which they had forgotten about. The anxiety at the possibility of a lost job, holiday or exam qualification and the subsequent relief were well conveyed and there was a great deal of gratitude for whoever saved the narrator.

More sophisticated responses embraced more abstract ideas such as forgotten values or forgetting to tell someone something before it was too late. Some responses included neat twists in the endings when narrators were helped by sympathetic teachers who provided missing pens and mathematical equipment when all appeared lost. In the best responses appropriate content was greatly enhanced with some impressive vocabulary and expression: *stole a glance at the antique exam room clock..; ..vast waiting room..;* and *..my father's perfect timing..*. Generally, narratives benefit greatly from the use of speech and dialogue and in this case was very effective in suggesting the sense of hopelessness when an item had been forgotten. However, some candidates struggle with presenting speech on the page, and unless two speakers are separated onto different lines, it can lead to real confusion.

5 Crowds.

This title was attempted by relatively few candidates. Some responses discussed crowds in general and how they created a particular atmosphere, sometimes enthusiastic as at a sporting event or sometimes threatening whenever a venue became overcrowded. One thoughtful essay, enlivened by personal anecdotes, involved a rather introverted girl who never felt at home in a crowd and she talked about her feeling of claustrophobia when in a crowd. She went on to describe her one and only acting experience – all was well until she faced her first audience and she had to withdraw from the stage, acutely embarrassed. There was also a vivid description of a crowded market with its pungent smells, elbowing and jostling, a gift for the *..pocket cutters..*. All this was vividly brought to life by the writer's feeling of loneliness and alienation.

In general, the sights and especially the sounds of various venues were well evoked, and it was clear that many candidates disliked the noise generated by crowds. Some candidates took a more specific view and spoke about crowds which attended a special sporting event or a religious festival. A third group of

candidates turned the title into a narrative and related an occasion when they had been surrounded by a crowd.

6 Write a story in which a small painting plays an important part.

This was not particularly popular. The responses fell into two categories: one involved the theft of a valuable painting and the other concerned the candidate winning an art competition. The same qualities and weaknesses that were evident in **Question 4** were apparent here.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

<p>Paper 1123/21 Comprehension</p>
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Key messages

It is necessary for candidates to gain a good, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions, before they begin to answer. Particularly with regard to questions on the second reading passage, this Paper demonstrated the necessity for such a practice, many scripts offering the same material or even the same answer for more than one question.

In **Question 1(a)** the use of bullet marks, while being an excellent way of presenting the information, were sometimes over-used, with one point being split between two – or even more – bullets. This resulted in two or three attempts at one point, none of which was complete in itself. In the same question, the specific detail which makes each point distinct should be carefully included; a mark may be lost because one vital word or phrase has been omitted. This was the case here, where the ‘popularity’ of glass was sometimes defined through a comparison between it and something else, such as pottery; it is important that both subjects of the comparison be included.

Omissions such as those mentioned above, when carried through to **Question 1(b)**, result in the faulty use of comparative words such as ‘less’ and ‘more’; these will require completion with mention of the other half of the comparison.

Again, for this question, attention is drawn to the necessity for further practice in noun-verb agreement and the correct inclusion of the definite or indefinite articles, according to context. Candidates should also practise linking the first words of their summary to the ten given words; frequently, one did not flow smoothly and sensibly into the other.

Candidates are advised to ensure that they spell correctly any uncommon words from the passage, if used, such as ‘architectural’ and ‘phenomenon’ and to give capital letters to those words in the original which have them e.g. ‘Egyptians’ and ‘Romans’.

In those questions which require candidates to answer without using the words of the passage, it is important that the whole context is taken into consideration. This applies whether it is to show understanding of one or two key words, as in **Question 5a)**, or to explain what is happening in the text, as in **Question 8(a)**. Answers should always be in full sentences rather than in individual synonyms, such as ‘evil = wicked, genius = cleverness’.

The final, vocabulary question was not particularly well done, suggesting the need for increased work on vocabulary or dictionary exercises, as well as wider reading of both fiction and non-fiction texts.

General Comments

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second, fiction. As in previous sessions, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2, as the latter required the usual understanding of implied meaning and some aspects of imagery and writer’s craft, as well as comprehension of vocabulary in context.

Most candidates were able to engage with the texts and with most of the tasks. There were few incomplete scripts.

The first passage, entitled 'Glass', explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these marks being awarded for selection of content points from the text of 'Glass' and 5 marks for the assessment of the candidates' capacity to express these points fluently in their own words. Further questions continued to test the ability to read for ideas, in this case to decide whether each of three statements was true or false and to identify two opinions, distinguishing them from the various facts of the passage.

In **Question 1(a)** many candidates scored ten or more marks, with several responses achieving the maximum 15 marks and very few scoring 5 or fewer. As there is no demand for notes to be made in their own words, many chose to lift the points from the passage. These were usually written under bullets and only did not score when one of these bullets was inserted in the middle of a point, or even a sentence, thus creating two incomplete points rather than one whole one. e.g.

- 'Church windows made of stained glass'
- 'religious stories were told to illiterates'

Those who gained the fewest marks in this first question had omitted the necessary detail to express the main points fully.

In **Question 1(b)**, there were some commendable attempts which used both original vocabulary and a variety of original structures. Such responses were secure in expression, scoring full or almost full marks. Many candidates attempted to rework the relevant details with the substitution of their own words here and there and the reworking gave them the opportunity to show some ability with original sentence structure. However, others showed little evidence of use of their own words and sometimes, in trying to re-position phrases from the passage, omitted words and caused distortion of the original meaning e.g. 'Greece was the only piece of evidence that glass spread.' Others, again, added material of their own invention, something outside the requirement of the rubric, as in: 'It is the main material in the jewellery industry' or 'You can find it anywhere you want to, in a hardware (sic) or a supermarket.' The weakest responses randomly selected patches of text, often encountering difficulty in linking them.

The second passage, 'Pi', tested the candidates' ability to read for meaning, with questions focusing on literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. Certain questions in this Section were challenging, as is usual given the nature of the material, and required extra, careful consideration of the text and the question wording to ensure exactly what was required.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Reading for ideas

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 and write down the points in the passage which described the uses and rise of popularity of glass in former times, and the reasons for the uses and continuing popularity of glass in modern times. The summary had to be based on Paragraphs 2–7, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, using 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. A number of candidates were able to reach the maximum 15 marks and many more scored in double figures. Low scores were quite rare, but where marks were denied it was usually because key words or phrases were missing, or because the candidate had strayed into irrelevant sections of the text..

Excluding those provided, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 19 further content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences. The rubric suggested that candidates might find it useful to use bullet points, and most did so, following the example of the given points, and realising that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented in this way. It was rare to find points listed in the wrong box.

Paragraphs 2, 3, 4 and 5 referred to the uses and rise in popularity of glass in former times, and there were 9 points which the candidates could make. Of these (excluding the first, given point) 2 were to be found in Paragraph 2: the making, by the Ancient Egyptians, of utensils from glass, and their development of techniques to create 'a range' of or different or 'vibrant' colours of glass. Although both these points referred to the Egyptians, only a first omission of reference to the Egyptians was taken into consideration in order to avoid a double penalty for the candidate who omitted such a connection. When the context of Egypt was established, most candidates were successful in gaining both of these points. Here, and elsewhere, the use of 'well known' as an alternative for 'popular' was commonly seen. It should be recognised that these are not quite synonymous; much that is well known is not necessarily liked by or attractive to people.

From Paragraph 3 candidates could select a further 3 points: that the Romans used patterns of coloured glass, i.e. mosaics, to cover walls or floors or, alternatively, as art work or decoration; that Roman glass utensils became inexpensive or were less expensive than pottery ones; and that they began the use of glass for architectural purposes, or for windows. Once again, a context (here, that of Rome) was initially to be established but a similar policy to that for the 'Egyptian' points of Paragraph 2 was adopted, only the first omission of reference to the Romans being taken into consideration. Expression of the second point in this paragraph, as suggested, could be made with the use of a comparison: 'glass utensils were less expensive than pottery ones'. If this was the form of expression chosen, reference to the pottery utensils was necessary to complete the idea; saying only 'glass utensils were *less* expensive' is incomplete. Candidates are once again advised that if no specific subject of an offered point is mentioned, the subject will be taken to be that of the rubric; here, 'glass'. So, for example, while most successfully made the first point in the paragraph, there were those who suggested that '*It* was used to cover floors'; this did not accurately specify what *sort* of glass was used in this way – i.e. 'patterns of coloured glass'. The final point in this paragraph was almost universally made correctly.

In Paragraph 4, most candidates recognised the invention of 'glass blowing' as an important use for the material and that was all that was needed; further information about what the process entailed was not necessary. The other point in this paragraph was less frequently noted: that its popularity was evidenced by the spread of glass to other, or many, parts of the world. Some inaccurately limited its spread to the three countries given as examples; others suggested its spread was the result of beautiful glass bottles being found in Greece 2000 years ago. They misunderstood that these bottles, *dating from* 2000 years ago, have only more recently been discovered in Greece, and are just one piece of evidence for the spread of glass to other countries.

Paragraph 5 concerned, first, the use of stained glass windows in Christian churches, which allowed those who could not read to access religious stories. While there was no insistence on the stained glass being in the windows, its use in a church was essential. Similarly it had to be 'stained' glass, or the given description of what that is: 'small pieces of coloured glass held together by lead'. Without these essential details the point could not be made. The second available point in the paragraph, and one clearly stated as something which ensured 'the popularity of glass', was 'admiration of the artistry' of such stained glass. Few candidates offered this. Those who did had usually given a successful expression of the previous point and followed it, at the next bullet, with the words of the passage: 'admiration for the artistry involved *here*.' The use of the word 'here', in such a position, was taken as a close enough link to the 'stained glass' description of the immediately preceding point.

The second part of the rubric asked for the reasons for the uses and continuing popularity of glass in modern times, and the remaining 10 points in Paragraphs 6 and 7. The first of these paragraphs concentrated on modern architectural uses of glass and its popular benefits and attractions in this area.

Apart from the first, given point of the section, there were 7 further points available in Paragraph 6, the first being that architects can show off their creativity by using different patterns, or colours, of glass. There followed 4 points which related to the energy and money-saving attractions of glass as a building material, all of which add to its popularity: glass walls reduce the amount of electricity needed to light a building; glass is a poor conductor of heat, or it regulates temperature in contrasting ways in hot and cold countries; this in turn reduces the costs of fuel for heating or air conditioning; there is even greater energy saving provided by the coatings and insulation which can now be applied to glass. The next point was the inexpensive nature of glass as a building material; finally, came reference to the current use of curved glass, particularly in certain public areas like airports, shopping arcades and concert halls. Many candidates attempted, and often scored, with all of these ideas. There were, however, a number of instances where the points were left incomplete. It was common to read the text lift that 'Modern glass can be given different types of coating and insulation' without the addition of the resulting energy saving. Again, while the popular use of glass in architectural design or for building 'public buildings and office complexes' was offered, the important reason and what makes it 'popular' for such use – 'because it is a relatively inexpensive building material' – was frequently omitted.

The last 3 points were in Paragraph 7. All were concerned with the environmental advantages of glass: glass is completely recyclable; it is more easily recycled than other materials or, specifically, than plastic; and finally the use of glass in the effort to educate people about, or to make them aware of, the need to save our planet. The general idea that glass is a material which can be used to give a sense of environmental awareness was quite acceptable, as was specific mention of this happening through the involvement in schools of the Ngwenya Glass workshop. Most candidates gained at least 2 of these 3 points, some missing out on the distinction that glass is *completely* recyclable or not completing the comparison with 'other materials', leaving the point unfinished, as in: 'Glass can be recycled *more easily*'; the reader was left to wonder, 'more easily' *than what?*

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, to describe the uses and rise in popularity of glass in former times, and the reasons for the uses and continuing popularity of glass in modern times, 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. Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. Very short answers were extremely rare; candidates have clearly been taught that sustained own words and stylish English, including a range of original complex sentences and other variety, cannot be demonstrated in such brief responses and thus cannot gain high marks.

The careful selection of material in the first part of the task generally had an impact on the coherence of the best answers in **Question 1(b)**. Large numbers of responses relied heavily on using the words of the passage, quite often moving them around in an attempt to take ownership of the text. Such manipulation of the original should be approached with great care. Sometimes it showed a candidate's ability to produce accurate and original structures e.g. 'It is used to build whole walls, *which* means less electricity is required to light the building, thereby *reducing* fuel bills'; an uncontrolled attempt, however could cause distortion of the sense intended, as in: 'The use of glass in constructing office complexes and public buildings makes architectural design very popular.' The focus of the popularity was shifted, here, to 'design' rather than 'glass'.

Several candidates achieved all available marks and many more came close to that. The best responses were confident in their sustained use of own words and structured their summaries with originality, variety and fluency. Others made a concerted effort to use original vocabulary but were sometimes over-ambitious in the attempt and the sense was unclear, as in the re-casting of the idea that glass can give a sense of environmental awareness: 'Glass as a storage material functions in formal enlightenment and collaborates with schools to impact a feeling of conservation.' Some of the weaker responses used the words of a given point in **Question 1(a)**, carrying forward the note form slash, rather than extending the comment into 'continuous writing': 'Glass...creates a feeling of airiness / space'.

The substitution of 'and' would have been the wiser choice. Another inappropriate alternative, used for both 'popular' and 'important', in this question, was 'famous'. Again, as mentioned in comments on **Question 1(a)**, there is a difference between these attempts at synonyms and the original words. 'Glass utensils were given to *famous* people' is subtly different from '...to *important* people' (text); 'Glass became *famous* because it saved on fuel bills', similarly, is not synonymous with '... became *popular* because it saved on fuel bills.'

There was a misconception shown by some candidates that the word 'glass' can be used in the plural to mean lots of it: 'People liked them because of the amazing inventions you could do with glasses. Even now glasses are still in use.' The only use of this word in the plural is as the common synonym for 'spectacles'. **Question 2** and **Question 3** continued to test Reading for Ideas, where candidates could show their ability to respond to the ideas presented in the whole text or a section of it.

To answer **Question 2**, which concerned Paragraph 1, candidates had to decide whether each of three statements based on the information in that paragraph was true or false. The first and third of these statements - that 'all glass is man-made' and that 'Pliny was a Phoenician sailor' - were false; the second, that 'man-made glass may have been discovered by accident', was true. Almost all candidates proved their careful reading and understanding of the paragraph and gained all 3 marks. The few who did not, apparently misread the rubric and indicated only the 'True' statement, ignoring the other two. Very careful reading of questions is always essential

Question 3 required candidates to select and write down two of the writer's opinions, from Paragraph 6. The better candidates often found both. Many more recognised the second opinion, with its very personal consideration of glass buildings as 'absolutely stunning', but not the first: 'The best way for an architect to show his creativity is by using different patterns and colours of glass'. Some did not score this because they omitted the very words which made it an opinion: 'The *best* way ...', or omitted the final words - 'of glass' - and so the sense was lost. There are many candidates who still find difficulty in separating opinion and fact, offering mere statements such as: 'Glass allows the entry of natural light', or the inaccurately copied 'Different types of coating and insulation make it even more energy-saving.'

Comments on specific questions

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

As is usually the case, the fiction text proved more demanding than Passage 1, candidates having to deal with less familiar vocabulary and a narrative style. The best responses demonstrated an ability to deal with questions of interpretation; many others had difficulty in answering the more discriminating questions.

Question 4(a) was a literal comprehension question asking in what two ways, according to Pi, was his name odd. This was well answered, almost without exception everyone spotting, in the first sentence, that he was named after a swimming pool or, more specifically, after 'Piscine Molitor'. The second reason, too, was clearly flagged with the words: 'What was even odder about my name...' in the final sentence of the paragraph, and candidates almost all correctly identified that his parents had never liked large expanses of water.

Question 4(b) was also well answered. Pi's uncle 'was a great storyteller' and candidates were asked to identify the topic of his favourite story. The majority recognised that, while most of these stories were about swimming competitions and swimming pools, it was '*in particular*' Piscine Molitor, or Molitor swimming pool which was his favourite. Answers referring only to the generalised 'swimming pools' and / or 'swimming competitions' were insufficient without the particular name.

Question 5(a) was the first question which required candidates to explain in their 'own words' and asked what prompted one of Pi's classmates to make fun of his name. Most answers concentrated on the fact that all the classmates found Pi's name ridiculous or silly. The focus should have been on that *one* classmate, and on recognising the key words describing him which made him point and shout out about Pi's name. The child, we are told, was 'full of evil genius' and some of the best candidates explained these characteristics in phrases such as: 'He was *clever* but he was a *bully*'; 'His classmate was *cruel* and *intelligent*'; 'He was *clever* enough to understand the meaning of Pi's name but he was *nasty*'. Other synonyms for 'evil', such as 'bad' and 'mean', were also seen and were perfectly acceptable. Candidates scored more frequently in offering alternatives for this word than for 'genius', for which there were fewer attempts to substitute in any way other than 'clever'. More answers than usual correctly identified the key words but made no attempt to recast them.

Question 5(b) focused on the 'other children', asking how they showed their cruelty. Almost all candidates successfully identified 'laughter' as their response to Pi's name, sometimes adding that 'The cruelty of children comes as news to no-one', or that they laughed until they 'fired into class'. Such additions were unnecessary but did not destroy the correct answer. Rarely, an answer suggested that they laughed at him 'all day long', or they 'always laughed at him'; these inaccurate additions spoiled the responses as the text clearly defined the extent of the laughter and went on to tell us how Pi prevented further mockery of this sort.

Question 5(c) asked for the single word in Paragraph 2 which showed that Pi dealt with the children's cruelty 'in different ways'. A good number of the better responses saw the importance of the 'different' idea and correctly offered 'alternatively'. There were more candidates, however, who suggested 'unprovoked'; this may have been the result of guessing or, not understanding that word, they ignored the full stop which came after it and linked it to Pi's 'alternative' actions in the next sentence without noting the significance of the correct word. A further few answered with 'pretending'.

Question 6(a) required candidates to explain the impression which the writer wished to create by his use of figurative language: the lesson 'started to stretch out like a desert.' Many candidates answered with 'It was hot.' The word 'desert' suggested heat to these candidates, but there was no appreciation of the full simile; it was the 'stretching out' feature of a desert which resembled the lesson, not the temperature. Correct responses focused either on the seemingly endless nature of the lesson or on a reason for it seeming to be endless i.e. that it was monotonous, boring, tedious, tiresome (though not 'tiring'), lifeless etc. 'The lesson was *long*' was a popular answer but that word gave the suggestion of a limit which fell short of the 'endless' idea. Questions involving the writer's craft always demand a degree of careful, unhurried thought.

Question 6(b) saw the correct answer in a majority of scripts. Asked why the teachers wiped their foreheads with their handkerchiefs, candidates knew that this, rather than the previous question, concerned the heat in the classroom; that the teachers were 'hot' or 'sweating' were both accurate deductions. Very occasionally, a candidate moved forward in the text to suggest, wrongly, that the teachers were trying to hide their laughter or their 'smirks' in the handkerchiefs. Many who had incorrectly offered 'It was hot' for **Question 6(a)** usually repeated that answer and scored here.

Question 6(c) was the least well answered question. It asked what the insult was which Pi said he 'anticipated'. The majority wrote that the insult was general mockery of or laughter at his name, by his classmates. Such responses did not take into consideration the closest mention of an insult i.e. that even the teachers 'seemed to smirk as they used' Pi's name. While 'smiling' or 'laughing' would have been satisfactory alternatives for the 'smirk', it was necessary to make clear that this particular insult was from the teachers in particular, when they used his name. (This was reinforced by the comment that, anticipating the insult, Pi changed his mind about answering the teacher's question.) Only the very best candidates answered this precisely; a number of others, in a correct attempt, chose to lift from the passage without distilling its content and, in doing so, used the unidentifiable pronoun: 'They seemed to smirk as they used' Pi's name. It was unfortunate, but without specifying 'The *teachers*...' this could have referred, incorrectly, to the other children.

Question 6(d) carried two marks, with the instruction to explain ‘fully’ how Pi reacted to the anticipated insult. The majority were successful in saying that Pi ‘put his hand down’, but such ‘explain fully’ questions require the whole situation to be explained. In this case, candidates had to say *why* his hand went down; that it was a result of changing his mind about answering a question. A minority did not extend their answers fully enough for the second mark. There were various ways of expressing all of this fully: ‘Pi dropped his hand down and changed his mind about answering the question’ is a simple example; the near-lift of ‘He put his hand down, and the teachers looked at him curiously, wondering why he was no longer offering to answer’ was also acceptable for its inference. However, those who left the phrase ‘changed his mind’ hanging, with no suggestion of ‘about...’ were not successful e.g. ‘He would change his mind and put his hand down’; had the candidate included ‘...change his mind *about answering*...’ the response would have been full enough and totally correct. A few candidates inaccurately suggested that Pi ‘did not put his hand up’; it was already up and the reaction was to bring it down.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates had to give two pieces of evidence which suggested that Ravi, had ‘a good reputation’ in the school. The required information had to be distilled from Paragraph 4, which included irrelevant material. That Ravi was the elected captain of the school cricket team was one proof of his good reputation which was almost universally offered. The other – that he was clever – was also usually correctly given. Copying from the passage, with something like ‘He had to follow in the footsteps of a very clever older sibling’ did not extract the important word and, blurring the required characteristic, did not score. Another incorrect answer was occasionally seen, based on the reference to swimming, and suggested that Ravi was a good swimmer. This was not borne out by the text; swimming, here, was about Pi’s excellence in that area and was completely unconnected to Ravi.

Question 7(b) was a question which the majority of candidates found challenging. It asked in what way Pi suffered from living ‘by the sea’. The answer lay in the fact that Pi never received any credit for his great talent in swimming because ‘...those who live by the sea...see swimmers as rather odd.’ While Ravi’s sporting prowess in cricket gave him status, Pi’s excellence in swimming was seen as unimportant, or odd, to those around him (who lived by the sea). Those were the two ideas which formed the correct answer: his talent for swimming and the lack of any recognition for this skill. A few of the weakest responses linked the word ‘suffered’, in the question, to the reference to ‘suffer’ in the second line of the paragraph, without considering the context of Pi living ‘by the sea’, and answered with an irrelevant text lift: ‘He suffered from having to follow in the footsteps of a very clever older sibling.’ Those who realised that the ‘suffering’ of the question had to do with his living by the sea answered in various ways, many of which lacked the crucial ideas e.g. ‘*Swimmers* were seen as rather odd’, with no reference to Pi’s excellence or at least his being ‘good’ at the sport; or ‘He was an excellent swimmer but this was unimportant’, without pointing out that it was unimportant *to other people* (and thus he received no acclaim for his talent.) There were others who answered with their own opinions that either ‘He could swim but everyone living by the sea can swim’, or even ‘Pi couldn’t swim even though he lived by the sea.’ Only the very best responses explained Pi’s suffering with an acceptable re-working of the text such as: ‘He was an excellent swimmer but people who lived by the sea saw swimmers as rather odd’, or an ‘own words’ version such as: ‘No-one cared about his talent as an excellent swimmer.’

Question 8(a) was another which was to be answered without using the words of the passage: to explain the ‘plan’ which Pi claimed to have. In its simplest form, his plan was to tell everyone that he was changing his old name (Piscine) to a new name, or nickname (Pi). A number of candidates found the question demanding, but there were many who answered correctly, in one of the many ways possible. There was much mention of his writing his name on the board, rather than calling it out as the class had been told to do. That was insufficient unless there was included a focus on both the name Piscine, his old or full or real name and its change to Pi, or a new name, a nickname or the name he wanted to be known by. So, ‘To write his name on the board as Pi and not Piscine’ was a succinct answer; ‘To write his full name and double underline the first two letters’ scored equally, as did ‘Giving them his old name and telling them his new name which he wanted to be called’ (sic). Suggesting that his plan was ‘To write his name on the board instead of saying it’ only gave reference to neither the old nor new name and was not credited.

Question 8(b) highlighted one word with inverted commas: ‘Why do you think Pi ‘hurried’ to the chalkboard?’ A small majority took note of this and accurately inferred that he wanted to get there quickly before the teacher could stop him or say anything to him or even call out his name in annoyance at his not doing as he was told. Many others ignored the highlighting and often repeated the previous answer: that he wanted to write his name on the board.

Question 9(a) was another inferential one, asking candidates to say why they thought Pi took ‘every chance’ to answer questions that day. The answer lay in his delight at hearing his *new* name called out by the teachers or in the possibility of the nickname being reinforced and used by everyone from then on. The question was not answered well, with only a minority responding correctly, with answers such as: ‘He was happy to hear his name *as a single syllable* which was music to his ears’; ‘So that the teachers and also the students will get accustomed to his *new* name’; and ‘So that the *nickname* would catch on with everyone.’ A number of attempts were based on a misunderstanding of the text. The ‘...single syllable which was music’ to Pi’s ears (i.e. his new, short name, Pi) was spoken by the teachers, and he wanted to hear that repeatedly. So, ‘Because *he* wanted to speak with a single syllable which was music to his ears’ did not address the question. Other incorrect responses depended on the idea that ‘he wouldn’t be laughed at any more’. That would only be the result of answering lots of questions and thus having his new name emphasised by being called out repeatedly by staff.

Question 9(b) asked what Pi’s brother might have been about to say and the answer depended on candidates noting the comment that Pi thought ‘mocking was to come’. Pi’s greatest fear was the mockery, especially in front of others such as Ravi’s friends, of his real name, Piscine, and that word was included in most of the correct answers. Other alternatives such as ‘His *real* name’, ‘His *full* name’ or ‘Piscine Molitor Patel’ also sufficed. Other reasonable inferences also scored, such as Ravi asking why Pi had changed his name or commenting that Pi was not his real name. Offering his brother’s actual words – ‘Anything’s better than “swimming pool”, even “lemon pie”’ – did not answer the question, which asked what do you think Ravi ‘*might* have been about to say?’ not ‘what *did* he say?’ While ‘He wanted to mock him by calling him by his real name’ was adequate, any suggestion that Ravi was going to ‘mock his name’, without saying *which* of his two names, was ambiguous and did not score.

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 from a choice of eight. Candidates did not score particularly well here, showing a need, as with ‘own words’ questions, to work on vocabulary building. The most popular choice was *freeze*, rarely taken out of context as ‘solid’ and usually given as ‘stop’, ‘still’ or ‘without movement’; ‘pause’ was not accepted, as suggesting too brief a stop. Equally popular was *promptly*, again often correctly re-cast as ‘quickly’, ‘immediately’ or ‘at once’. *Stunt* was frequently attempted, but with a little less success than the previous two: ‘trick’, ‘performance’ and ‘act’ were the best synonyms, conveying the idea of Pi’s prepared routine. Correct alternatives for *waft* included ‘drift’, ‘float’ and ‘sailed’ but many others, such as ‘spread’, ‘swept’ and ‘travelled’ omitted the implied gentleness of the original. Two other words were also quite frequently attempted, and recasting was sometimes appropriate: for *refuge*, there was ‘asylum’, ‘safety’, ‘protection’ and ‘haven’ – but ‘peace’, ‘rest’, ‘comfort’ and ‘freedom’ did not convey the necessary sense of ‘security’; for *sauntered*, ‘strolled’ and ‘walked slowly’ were occasionally seen but the most frequent answer was ‘walked’ which, alone, was inadequate and needed the modifier mentioned (‘slowly’) or another such as ‘casually’ or ‘lazily’ which were very rarely seen. *unprovoked* was one of the most challenging words, but the best candidates either knew its meaning, or worked it out from the context, giving ‘uncalled for’, ‘without cause’ or ‘for no reason’. ‘unangered’ was a popular suggestion, presumably because the candidates knew that ‘provoking’ can mean ‘annoying’ or ‘making angry’; although a brave attempt, this was not quite suitable. The other word which challenged the majority was *inadvertently*. Again good responses substituted it with ‘unintentionally’, ‘accidentally’ or ‘didn’t mean to’, but answers such as ‘not in the same direction’ and ‘doesn’t cause alarm to people’ were incorrect. The word was rarely attempted. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, there was no insistence on correct grammatical form.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Comprehension

Key messages

It is necessary for candidates to gain a good, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions, before they begin to answer, particularly with regard to questions on the second passage. Closer reading of the whole text before tackling the questions would help to clarify the narrative and the sequence and logic of events 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 comprehension questions. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.

As in the past, many candidates experienced difficulties with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words.

As in previous sessions, the final vocabulary question was not particularly well done, suggesting the need for students to work on vocabulary or dictionary exercises, as well as to increase reading of both fiction and non-fiction material.

In **Question 1(a)**, candidates are advised that content points cannot be scored if they are spread over two bullets with no obvious link, or if they are put in the wrong boxes. Candidates should also focus in this question on making the *whole* point; it is easy to miss marks because details have been omitted. Because of this, in **Question 1(a)** it was generally points which required fewer elements, or points which could be lifted straight from the text in a few words, which were more frequently made.

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 needs to be done on the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately. Candidates are also advised to practise linking the first words of their summary to the given words as often the flow of sense was interrupted.

Candidates need practice in recognising the difference between opinion and fact in the first, non-fiction passage. In general, practice is needed in spotting when a writer is speaking for himself/herself and offering a view which another might challenge.

Candidates also need practice in recognising imagery and decoding simile and metaphor.

General Comments

Candidates were 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, as Passage 2 required understanding of implied meanings and some aspects of imagery and writer's craft.

Most candidates seemed to engage with the tasks and the texts. There were very few incomplete scripts, although there was perhaps a greater incidence than in previous sessions of individual questions not being attempted.

In **Question 1(a)** many candidates did not score certain points because they named a feature of palm oil without enlarging on its effect. Nevertheless, selection of points was for the most part full and accurate, with only a few instances of straying into the irrelevant material contained in the first paragraph or adding their own views on the subject.

Both passages, the first entitled 'Palm Oil' and the second entitled 'Swimming', 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 'Palm Oil' 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, to distinguish fact from opinion, and to infer the overall tone of the text.

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

The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were 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, although such instances were fewer than in previous sessions. Other candidates needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks by, for example, re-casting whole phrases rather than individual words. The majority of candidates made some attempt to use own words and almost all wrote to the required length. Better responses took ownership of the text without straying from the content. These responses were secure in expression and had a real overview and 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 the uses and benefits of palm oil in the present day, and then the concerns associated with it and what is being done to address those concerns, as outlined in the passage. The summary had to be based on Paragraphs 2–6, and candidates were 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 strayed into the irrelevant first paragraph. Many more candidates than in previous sessions were able to identify more than 15 points, although they could be awarded only 15 marks. 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 19 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, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 referred to the uses and benefits of palm oil in the present day, and there were 13 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 3 content points, (excluding the provided first point) about the uses and benefits of palm oil in the present day. Palm oil can be used to make processed food, or alternatively it contains a natural preservative which enhances the shelf-life of food; it has a smooth or creamy texture which make it ideal in many recipes, or make it useful in baking or cooking; it has medicinal properties. For the latter point, any one of the health-related examples from the text was rewarded with the mark. Candidates responded well to this paragraph and if a point was missed it tended to be that the reference to smooth or creamy texture of palm oil was omitted.

Paragraph 3 was concerned with the uses of palm oil linked to its ability to make fuel called biodiesel. One point to be made was that palm oil was used to make biodiesel. Because there were three subsequent content points which were overtly about biodiesel and not about palm oil, reference to biodiesel was not essential for the mark. Thus, candidates were rewarded for writing that palm oil provided fuel for cars, that it was sustainable or less polluting than petrol, and that it was used for heating purposes. It showed a better understanding of the text to spell out that it was biodiesel which provided fuel for cars and heating, and was sustainable. However, 'palm oil' was accepted as the agent. There were 2 further content points in Paragraph 3, which were that waste material of palm oil production can be used to create energy, and that, after it has been used for cooking, palm oil can be treated to provide yet more biodiesel. The reference to cooking was very often omitted in this latter point, meaning that the mark was not scored. Throughout this paragraph, the terms 'biodiesel', 'fuel', 'energy' and 'biofuel' were taken as interchangeable, as language understanding, and not science, was being tested here.

There were a further 4 points to be found in Paragraph 4. Palm oil needs half the amount of land to produce the same amount of oil compared with other oils, or palm oil production is cheaper than that of other oils. The paragraph began with the words 'compared with other types of oil' and many candidates copied what came after that: 'palm oil needs half the amount of land to produce the same amount of oil'. There was no comparison here and so the point was not made, a problem encountered by many candidates. Similarly, the following point, which was that palm oil is a high-yielding crop, or that both the flesh and the kernel produce fruit, was often not fully made because the necessary link to the benefits this brings was overlooked, namely that palm oil is lucrative or profitable for the companies which produce it. Candidates could go on to make another two points: palm oil plantations bring employment and also improved infrastructure, or improved services. Examples of infrastructure were acceptable, as long as a minimum of two were given and that they were to be found in the text and not in the knowledge or experience of the candidates. Lifting 'advantages' from the text was too vague and could not on its own make the point.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the concerns associated with palm oil and what is being done to address those concerns, as outlined in the passage. Paragraph 5 described the first element, namely the concerns associated with palm oil, and candidates could make 4 points (excluding the provided first point): palm oil companies develop the land without consulting the people who live there, or without offering them compensation; deforestation (understood to be caused by palm oil plantations, although it was not necessary to specify this) causes greenhouse gases or global warming; deforestation (again understood to be caused by palm oil plantations, although it was not necessary to specify this) destroys the habitats of many animals. The final point in this paragraph began to address the second part of the rubric at this point, namely what is being done to address the concerns around palm oil production, and was that the Malaysian government promised to limit the expansion of palm oil plantations.

Paragraph 6 continued to describe the second element of the rubric. It was possible to find 2 content points: environmental groups, or Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth, campaign to raise the issues; the Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil or simply 'an organisation', outlines the criteria with which palm oil companies should comply. These were difficult concepts and most candidates played safe by lifting. Where these points were not made, it tended to be because of omission of 'campaign' or 'by which palm oil companies should comply' (although own words equivalents were acceptable too for these points.)

A large number of candidates scored 9 marks and above. Although points could be made by producing a list of notes or short sentences in bullet point form, as indicated above, rather than in continuous prose, these points nevertheless need to be fully made with appropriate detail and extensions which have an effect on the meaning or fullness of the points.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the uses and benefits of palm oil in the present day, and then the concerns associated with it and what is being done to address those concerns, 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.

Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were some candidates, but perhaps fewer than in previous sessions, 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 innovative 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 proved unwise in that the over-ambitious vocabulary did not entirely match the meaning of the original. There are still attempts to use connectives or adverbs with little understanding of the meaning. The most common errors made in this question were:

- subject-verb agreement
- confusion over spelling of 'its' and 'it's'
- swapping tenses within a sentence
- connectives used awkwardly or inappropriately, e.g. 'In the other hand'; 'continuing on' and 'after that.'
- confusion over masculine and feminine ('his' and 'her')
- 'although' misused (instead of 'however')
- wrong links, e.g. ' Moreover' followed by converse argument.
- error in forming the comparative, e.g. 'more cheaper'
- confusion between the noun 'use' and the verb 'used'.
- wrong use of prepositions
- missing definite or indefinite article (although this error was penalised only once)
- intrusive definite or indefinite article (although this error was penalised only once)

Nearly all candidates attempted the question. Candidates are advised that very short answers cannot justify a high mark, since they cannot demonstrate a sustained use of own words or a range of original complex sentence structures.

If many fewer points were made in **Question 1(b)** than in **Question 1(a)**, this would be 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 re-shape and re-cast the original text in original complex sentences, and therefore able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Question 2, Question 3 and Question 4 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 5000 years ago palm oil was used only in food and medicine – was false, as the passage stated that food and medicine were examples only. The second statement – that palm oil was an important commodity during the British Industrial Revolution – was true, as the passage stated that demand for palm oil increased significantly during the British Industrial Revolution. The third statement – palm oil was first produced in Nigeria – was not stated in the passage, as the only link between palm oil and Nigeria was that Nigeria exports palm oil today. The whole range of possible marks was seen here, with very many, however, classifying all three statements correctly.

In **Question 3** candidates were to select and write down one opinion from Paragraph 3. The key to answering this type of question is to home in on words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the word was 'wonderful', thus supplying the opinion that it is wonderful that by November 2102 RSPO had over 1000 members. This question yielded few correct responses. An alternative opinion was also accepted: the key will be to minimise the negative ones - a weaker, but acceptable answer. Given that the paragraph contained only six sentences, and any two of these five were acceptable answers, it is surprising that so few candidates were able to make an appropriate selection. The most popular incorrect answer was the third sentence: 'They argue that...switching to biofuels', whereas candidates might have seen that this was the opinion of the environmental groups and not of the writer, and in that respect was merely a statement and not an opinion. Some candidates spoiled an otherwise correct answer by adding a second sentence.

In Question 4, candidates were to decide which sentence best described the tone of the ending of the passage. As the third last sentence of the text began with 'It is wonderful', and as the final sentence referred to the possibility of minimising negative impacts and by implication playing up positive ones, this all pointed to the passage ending on a positive note. Most candidates were able to make this inference.

Comments on specific questions: Section 2

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

Question 5(a) asked for the reason why Pi and Ravi called their father's business contact 'uncle'. The correct answer was to indicate respect and affection, although the weaker answer that he was a family friend was also acceptable; most candidates gave one of these responses.

Question 5(b) asked what part the uncle looked hi whole life, the answer being that the uncle looked like a competitive or a champion or a professional swimmer. Candidates could write that he looked the part he had looked in his youth, i.e. a competitive or a champion or a professional swimmer, but if they lifted 'when he was a young man he was a champion competitive swimmer', this was not accepted as a correct response as it did not answer the question but offered only a statement about the uncle in his youth.

Most candidates found **Question 5(c)** challenging. They were asked why Ravi was spinning his hands above his head, the answer being that he was showing what the doctor did to the uncle when he was born or what the doctor did to the uncle to get him breathing. Many candidates omitted to mention the doctor, or the uncle, or birth, or breathing; others gave a generalisation such as 'so that Pi could imagine the scene'; others wrote that the doctor was forcing flesh and blood to the uncle's upper body, which was the story that Pi believed and not the purpose of Ravi's action.

The answer to **Question 5(d)**, which asked why Pi believed Ravi's story, was that Pi was young, or younger than Ravi, or naïve, or that Ravi was the older brother. Most candidates wrote, incorrectly, that the uncle had a thick chest and skinny legs; the addition of the exclamation 'to think that I believed him!' was designed to open up the inference that Ravi was playing a trick on his young brother by making up a story. This inference was understood by relatively few candidates. There was some misreading of the question as some candidates answered in the affirmative: 'Yes', thinking, presumably, that the question was asking 'Did Pi believe the story?' rather than 'Why did Pi believe the story?'

Question 6(a) referred to the parents looking 'as if they were walking through a jungle spreading tall grass in front of themselves' and asked candidates to explain what was actually happening here. Candidates had first to de-code the simile and then express what could be decoded without copying from the text. They were to write firstly that the parents were walking in water, or wading, as the decoding of 'walking through a jungle'; then they were to write that they were moving their arms in a round movement, or making swimming movements with their hands or arms, as a decoding of 'spreading tall grass in front of themselves'. Most candidates made one of the two points, although few made both.

Question 6(b) asked for what Ravi had in common with his parents, and there was a degree of success here, the answer being that he couldn't swim, or didn't like swimming, or didn't want to learn how to swim. A common wrong answer was the lift of 'just as unenthusiastic'; this was an acceptable answer but only if 'about swimming' was added; merely being 'unenthusiastic' without a focus was meaningless.

In **Question 6(c)** candidates were asked to pick out a single word used later in paragraph 2 which was linked to the idea of 'willing disciple'. There were two acceptable answers, the better being 'guru', although 'faithful' was also acceptable. There was a reasonable degree of success here; 'extravagantly' was the most common wrong answer, although a range of incorrect responses was given, such as 'watchful', 'distress', and 'unenthusiastic.' Some candidates offered the phrase 'aquatic guru', which could not be rewarded as the question asked for a single word.

In **Question 6(d)**, candidates were asked why the uncle's opinion distressed Pi's mother. The fact that two marks were allocated might have led candidates to see that one part of the answer was the uncle's opinion and the second part of the answer was the reason for the mother's distress. The uncle's opinion was that Pi was old enough to learn to swim, or for swimming lessons, or that seven was the right age to start swimming or to have swimming lessons, while the mother felt that Pi was too young, or that seven was too young to learn how to swim or to have swimming lessons. Sometimes responses were unclear whether they were referring to the mother or uncle. Many responses suggested that the mother wanted Pi to learn to swim. Additionally, there were some suggestions that it was the mother who wanted to learn how to swim.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked to explain in their own words why swimming in a pool was preferable to swimming in the sea, and in order to answer the question they had to explain the two key words: predictability and flatness. There was much success with the explanation of the idea of 'flatness', and the point could be made by reference either to the pool or to the sea: the pool was even, calm, smooth or had no waves, or the sea was rough or had waves. Candidates found re-casting 'predictability' challenging: the pool was always the same, or swimmers knew what to expect with a swimming pool. As with 'flatness' the point could be made either by reference to the pool or to the sea, making possible correct answers such as 'the sea could be surprising', or 'the sea could be unexpected'. It was also possible to make both points succinctly, as in 'pools are always calm' or 'the sea is never calm'.

Question 7(b) asked why Pi's trips to the swimming pool were a ritual, and this question had a two-point answer, the first point linked to days and the second linked to time of the day. The trips took place on the same days, or they always went on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; they always went early in the morning, or they always went at the same time, or every trip was early in the morning. Responses which did not include the key elements of 'same' or 'always' or 'every' as required resulted in many incomplete, and therefore incorrect, answers which did not capture the full idea of 'ritual'. This proved to be a very discriminating question.

In **Question 7(c)** candidates were asked to explain why swimming 'instruction' became swimming 'practice.' The key to a correct answer lay in making the point that Pi had learned to swim or could now swim. This meant that possible correct answers were 'Pi had learned how to swim' or 'Pi had been taught how to swim'. Some weak candidates incorrectly lifted 'doing a stroke with increasing ease and speed' from the text. As the question did not ask candidates to use their own words, they were free to use the words 'instruction' and 'practice', so a possible correct answer could be 'Pi had now learned all the instruction', or 'Pi could swim and had only to practise now.'

In **Question 7(d)**, candidates were asked why Pi thought of swimming in the sea as a guilty pleasure. The key was the idea of the trips being forbidden, secret or concealed. This meant that correct answers were that his uncle didn't know about it, or his uncle didn't want him to swim in the sea. Because this was an inferential question, it was not necessary to mention the uncle in a correct response, so that 'he was forbidden to go there', or 'his parents didn't know where he was' or even 'nobody knew where he was' were considered correct. Incorrect answers were ones which mentioned only pleasure with no attempt to explain 'guilty'; some candidates lifted the passage at 'beckoned by the mighty waves' or 'the gentle tidal ripples', which captured only the concept of 'pleasure'. Other incorrect answers were those which focused on the fact that Pi was alone.

Question 8 asked candidates what Pi's father liked to do in his spare time, the answer being that he talked about swimming. This was generally well done, with incorrect answers being that he liked to talk, with no mention of the subject of his talk, or the suggestion that he was listening to other people talking. The lift of 'swimming lore was his leisure talk' was incorrect as it did not answer the question, but gave only the subject of his conversation rather than the fact that it was what he liked to do during his leisure. Some of the weaker responses stated that he liked to swim or to talk about his business.

Question 9(a) was an inferential question where candidates were asked what, according to the uncle, was special about the Deligny pool, and the answer was found by those who read the passage carefully. The text began with the information that the Deligny pool was unfiltered and unheated, and many candidates incorrectly gave this as a response, without reading on to the reference that 'an Olympic pool is an Olympic pool', to make the inference that what was special about the Deligny pool was that it was an Olympic pool. Many candidates who made that inference spoiled an otherwise correct response by adding that it was unheated and unfiltered, which could not be credited as a correct answer because it changed the focus of the question.

Question 9(b) was a relatively straightforward question asking which one of the uncle's exaggerations about the Molitor pool was impossible, the answer being that it was as big as a small ocean. References to its swimming club, to the section reserved for swimmers who wanted to swim lengths, to changing rooms, hot water, or porters were incorrect, and if any of these were added to the correct answer they negated it as the question specified **one** exaggeration.

Question 9(c) was a question on the writer's craft, in which candidates were asked what the writer wished to convey by stating that the uncle's memory 'was swimming too many lengths to remember'. It was necessary to decode the image of swimming lengths, as the uncle was not swimming but remembering. 'Too many' had to be linked to the idea of 'very many' or 'too many to remember'. This meant that acceptable correct answers were answers such as 'he had too many memories to talk about' or 'there was so much to talk about' or 'he was overwhelmed by his memories'. Incorrect answers which did not decode the swimming image were common, such as 'he was remembering swimming in the pool' or 'he had swum so many lengths he could not remember'. This was a differentiating question which proved to be challenging for many candidates.

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. Candidates did not score particularly well here, showing the need for candidates to work on vocabulary building and to think about words in the context in which they are used in order to make sense of them. The most frequently correct answer was 'beauty', 'magnificence' or 'grandeur' for 'splendour', and 'tired', 'exhausted' or 'worn out' for 'spent'. Most candidates who attempted 'ludicrous' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'ridiculous', 'silly', or 'absurd'; 'awkward' and 'strange' were considered to be too imprecise. For 'prone to' a mark could be scored for 'tended to', 'inclined to' or 'likely to', although 'subject to' and 'susceptible to' were considered not to have quite the same focus, suggesting something working from the outside rather than something residing within. Synonyms for 'practically' were 'almost' 'nearly', or 'virtually'; there were many wrong answers here. Correct synonyms for 'beckoned' were 'called' or 'invited'. 'Fluttered' was almost never attempted, where acceptable synonyms were 'flapped' or 'moved gently' or 'moved lightly'. Likewise, 'tomfoolery' was almost never attempted, although there were many acceptable synonyms which could have been worked out in context, such as 'silliness', 'misbehaviour' or 'pranks'.

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 at all. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, there was no insistence on correct grammatical form.