

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should ensure they identify the key words in each task to enable them to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word **and** is in bold type as this indicates that there are two key parts to the bullet point.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should ensure that they use an appropriate format and style for the required text type.
- Candidates are advised to adhere to the suggested wordcounts for each section.
- Candidates should remember that the majority of marks in this exam are for language and check that tenses are consistent and be careful with spelling and punctuation.
- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.

General comments

- The vast majority of candidates appeared fully engaged with the questions and there were very few short or irrelevant responses.
- The best responses were characterised by highly accurate writing and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Vocabulary was impressive, with many responses featuring a wide range of words appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement were the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors included confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and incorrect use of commas and apostrophes. Candidates should also avoid the use of slang expressions.
- Performance on **Section 1** was strong among the majority of candidates with the bullet points being generally well addressed.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section 2** questions. The wide range of options meant that all candidates had the opportunity to find a topic they were interested in writing about.
- A few candidates included violent and/or sexual content in their **Section 2** composition. This must be avoided.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

This question required candidates to write a school magazine article about a course they had attended in their spare time. The purpose of the article was to give information about the course and to encourage other candidates to join it. Both the situation and the purpose proved to be highly accessible to candidates whose responses showed evidence of candidates clearly having had experience of these types of courses.

The following points had to be included:

- what type of course it was **and** where it took place
- details of the activity on the course they enjoyed the most, and why
- how the course might benefit other students.

For **bullet point 1**, candidates had to say what type of course it was **and** where it took place. As the **and** was in bold, candidates had to address both parts of the bullet point in order to be fully credited for this point and the large majority of candidates did this. There were a huge range of courses described with sports, cooking, computer and first aid courses being among the most popular. Locations also varied widely and included venues in the local area and also in major cities and abroad. A number of candidates wrote about online courses which was a valid approach. Most candidates performed well on this bullet point. Among those who were less successful, there were a few responses that lacked precision and in some cases the course appeared to be in the future or the venue was not specified. Some responses detailed a hobby the candidate enjoyed such as football or running but this was not linked to a course. In other cases candidates wrote about a match they had played in, rather than a course.

For **bullet point 2**, candidates had to give details of the activity on the course they enjoyed the most and why. Most candidates responded well to this bullet point and successfully identified the activity they liked the best. Examples of this included playing matches on a sports course or a particular topic they found interesting on an academic course. A few candidates performed less well on this bullet point as they wrote about the course generally, rather than identifying any specific activities that they enjoyed. There were a wide variety of reasons given as to why the activity was enjoyable including the fact that it was hands on or helped them to develop new skills.

For **bullet point 3**, candidates had to explain how the course might benefit other students. Candidates generally did well on this bullet point and there were lots of different ideas given. These included health benefits for sports courses and academic and future employment benefits for academic courses. The idea that the course would help with future university applications or lead to a scholarship was also a popular one. There were a few candidates who only wrote about what they got out of the course and did not consider the benefits for other students but most candidates did pick up on the need for this to be a persuasive article encouraging others to attend the course.

Balance is required in selecting material for Task Fulfilment and it usually works best to write roughly the same amount for each bullet point. Also, it does not help to add overlong introductory and concluding sections that are not directly related to the task.

The majority of candidates included a heading as an appropriate feature of article format and also added their name at the end of their article. The best headings were lively and gave a flavour of the content of the article. Some candidates also used subheadings which are also appropriate for an article format. Some responses did not include any features of article format and in some cases, candidates appeared not to have read the question carefully as they wrote in another format, such as a speech or a letter.

There was a good sense of audience in most responses, with candidates understanding that they were being asked to write an article for their peers and using appropriately informal language and techniques such as direct address and rhetorical questions to engage with the audience. Tone and register were appropriate in the large majority of responses, with the most successful ones using a persuasive and conversational approach. There was a tendency for some candidates to take a narrative style approach where they simply described what they did, and in some cases, this reduced engagement with the audience.

Better responses demonstrated an ability to successfully appeal to the audience and use convincing details to support their points. Candidates often used appropriate high-level vocabulary, such as *inspired*, *engagement*, *passion* and *livelihood*. A few candidates did use inappropriately informal terms such as *gonna* and there was the occasional example of an invented word such as *overally*.

Generally, spelling was satisfactory, with confusion of homophones being the most common error. Errors were commonly seen in words like *there* and *their*, *too* and *to* and *your* and *you're*. Other difficult words such as *necessary* and *beautiful* were generally spelled correctly.

Grammar was often the weakest area and there was frequent confusion in the use of tenses and articles. This made some responses difficult to understand. Punctuation was generally accurate although some responses showed weak sentence control and included very long sentences. Others used the lower case 'i' when writing about themselves. Candidates are recommended to proofread their work carefully to help them correct errors.

Section 2: Composition

The vast majority of candidates wrote complete **Section 2** responses. A few candidates wrote very brief responses which suggested that they had perhaps spent too much time on **Question 1**. Some very long

responses that went far beyond the recommended 350 to 500 words were also observed. These responses were often characterised by a loss of control of grammar as the composition continued and this could lead to a lack of cohesion overall.

Question 2

Describe the typical scene in a busy restaurant or café you know. (Remember you are describing the atmosphere and any people, as well as the restaurant or café itself.)

The description task was attempted by a reasonable number of candidates and some produced excellent pieces about local restaurants or cafés. Most chose to write about places they liked but there were also some skilful pieces that described places where hygiene and customer service were distinctly lacking.

The best responses employed descriptions involving all senses to give accounts of the atmosphere and the people and made effective use of detail to bring the place they were describing to life. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like *ambience*, *sophisticated* and *vibrant*.

Less successful responses often relied too much on narrative, describing the events of the day or evening, rather than describing the restaurant or café. The focus of this task should be on description rather than on narrative. The language in these weaker compositions was less precise with some repetition of words like *beautiful*, *tasty* and *amazing*. The present tense was used well by most candidates but others used the present and past tense inconsistently.

Question 3

'Telling people what they should do only makes them do the opposite.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was the least commonly attempted of the **Section 2** tasks. Most candidates seemed familiar with the argument and the majority believed that telling people what to do was counterproductive. Commonly cited arguments were the facts that people dislike being told what to do and that young people in particular like to rebel against authority. The best responses included convincing use of detail to support arguments given, with some candidates writing from their own experience and others using examples from school. Some candidates offered an alternative viewpoint which was that young people need to be told what to do sometimes in order to keep them safe and to stop them from making mistakes.

The most successful responses were well structured, beginning with an introduction and often considering argument and counter argument, before finishing with a conclusion. These responses also employed some impressive vocabulary including words and phrases like *motivation*, *autonomy* and *consequence*.

Less successful responses struggled to advance a clear argument and sometimes became repetitive and unclear. Candidates need to be able to organise and develop ideas logically in order to perform well on an argument question. Candidates should also be sure that they have enough to say before attempting the task. Some candidates ran out of ideas fairly quickly and resorted to repeating points.

Question 4

'It is completely unfair to judge the behaviour of people in the past by the way we think today.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was the more popular of the two argument questions (**Question 3** and **Question 4**). Candidates who attempted it often did so effectively and there was a wide range of opinions expressed on the topic. Different approaches were taken with some candidates considering the behaviour of past societies as a whole and others considering the behaviour of individuals. Both of these approaches could work well.

Commonly seen arguments against judging people in the past by the way we think today were the fact that life was harder in the past and that cultural and social norms were different. Candidates also often referred to technology and the way that this has changed modern life. Commonly observed arguments in favour of judging people in the past by today's standards were that some things could be considered to be morally wrong at any time and that people should have known better. Many candidates examined both sides of the argument and ended up taking a balanced view that it depended on the circumstances.

This topic allowed candidates to take a variety of approaches and bring in knowledge from other subjects. Candidates benefitted from planning their response to this question as this allowed them to organise their ideas and ensure that there was a logical flow to their argument.

Question 5

Write a story which contains the sentence: 'I had never been so curious about another person before.'

This was the most popular of all of the **Section 2** tasks. Candidates were able to use the sentence in a variety of ways and many produced imaginative and interesting stories. The sentence could be added at any point in the story and most responses integrated the sentence convincingly into their stories.

Common themes included new candidates at school, long lost relatives or a mysterious person who had moved into the area. Many of these narratives were very well-constructed, with candidates often making effective use of features such as dialogue and coming up with inventive beginnings and endings. There were a small number of responses which included inappropriate violent or sexual content. This must be avoided.

Less successful responses lacked detail and were sometimes confusing. A common language weakness was inconsistent use of the past and present tense which made the response confusing and difficult to follow.

Question 6

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

This question was attempted by a reasonable number of candidates. There was a wide variety of different types of coincidence from seeing an old friend for the first time in a long time to being rescued from a difficult situation by someone who happened to be passing.

Whatever the story, the best writing contained varied sentence types and lengths, as well as linked paragraphs. The precise use of a wide range of vocabulary also improved responses.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Writing

Key messages

- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**; the word **and**, in bold type, indicates two parts to the bullet point. It should not be assumed that the answer to the second half of the bullet is implied by what has been said before.
- For both of the Writing tasks it is useful for candidates to familiarise themselves with the band descriptors in the Mark Scheme, to use as a guide to improving the effectiveness of their responses.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority of candidates. Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and a more varied use of punctuation (colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks) would also raise the level of most responses.
- Poor handwriting can impact on performance. This is very true of copying in pen over a rough draft in pencil. Illegible handwriting and excessive crossings out often make a point difficult to follow.
- Idiomatic phrases can be impressive when used sparingly. Candidates should be wary of using complex vocabulary unless their use is fully understood.

General comments

Covid-19 restrictions may have had an impact on the overall performance of candidates. In the circumstances, candidates did extremely well but it was evident from the unusual number of very short or unfinished answers that some candidates may have struggled to perform at their best. Some of the writing was very difficult to decipher, some was illegible and there were many crossings out. There was, however, some extremely high-quality writing and performance on Task Fulfilment in **Section 1** was very strong. This year, in **Section 2**, all the titles, apart from **Question 2**, were popular and there was another increase in the number of candidates taking on the Argument titles.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

In **Section 1**, most candidates performed well on Task Fulfilment. The task required them to imagine an increase in the number of tourists in their area and to write a report to the local council giving their views. Candidates had to be aware that, to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points, a response required:

- the advantages of more tourists visiting the local area
- the disadvantages of more tourists visiting the local area
- which disadvantage the local council should deal with first **and** how they should deal with it.

For **bullet point 1**, successful candidates gave a number of advantages. More tourists provided more income for local businesses, a great relief after the pandemic, and led to more jobs so that unemployment decreased. The infrastructure of the region was improved, with roads, hospitals, schools and new attractions being built as the economy was made stable. Candidates suggested that the local area received more recognition globally as tourists posted pictures on social media. There was an increased awareness of each other's culture which often improved harmony between people. The bullet point asked for more than one advantage and most candidates provided at least two of those detailed above. Some weaker responses included just one advantage, usually about increased income. Stronger responses gave examples such as shops which had prospered and new jobs which had arisen within the tourism industry. Weaker responses

merely featured a list of advantages without further expansion or comment. Also, some candidates talked about the advantages *for* the tourists, rather than the advantages that increased tourism brought to the area.

Candidates were extremely clear in **bullet point 2** about the disadvantages brought by more tourists. By far the most obvious was the problem of litter and the wider problem of pollution. Various packaging from fast food made the local area untidy, unhygienic and dangerous for wildlife; the use of plastic in so many items meant that beaches and marine creatures were badly affected. Crime was now more obvious and local flora and fauna suffered with the building of new infrastructure. There was also the problem of noise pollution with rowdy tourists playing music late at night. Congestion, with people on narrow streets and with cars on highways, made normal life impossible. Furthermore, local hotels were exclusively occupied by tourists making life difficult for local people. Added to this was the rise in prices caused by the influx of tourists and local people often found themselves priced out of the market. For some, the dilution of culture, referred to as the demonstration effect, was a worrying development as younger people copied western styles and habits. Worse still were those tourists who appeared ignorant of the requirements of local religious practices and seemingly unsympathetic towards the local culture. A small number of candidates confused tourists with immigrants and raised homes and businesses being overtaken by foreigners. Again, most candidates indicated at least two disadvantages as the bullet point required. However, some weaker responses were limited to only one disadvantage, and this made it difficult in **bullet point 3** to choose a priority.

For **bullet point 3**, candidates were asked to indicate which was the most serious disadvantage. They usually did this by lifting the word *first* from the bullet point, but some used the words *main* or *priority* or something similar to convey this. Some used the bullet point as a heading to the paragraph. Some implied it by dealing with just the one disadvantage in this section and so it was clear to the reader. There was nothing wrong with dealing with more than one disadvantage here, as long as one of them was specified as the priority. This was usually the first disadvantage the candidate had highlighted under **bullet point 2**. Some responses were significantly weakened by including more than one disadvantage and failing to make it clear which was the priority.

There were many different solutions to how the problem should be dealt with. The main ones were providing signs to educate tourists, implementing fines, providing more rubbish bins, reducing the use of plastics, building more roads and having a two-tier price system in shops so that prices were fairer to local people – *The problem of littering should be dealt with first to secure the beauty of the mountains. This can be done by first cleaning the area and then putting a hefty fine on littering.* Weaker responses failed to be sufficiently specific and fell back on the idea of simply limiting the number of tourists. Weaker still were those responses which offered no specific suggestion and instead urged the council to *do something* about the problem.

In **bullet points 1, 2 and 3**, responses were particularly strong in terms of avoiding too much unnecessary narrative, relying on shorter examples to illustrate the advantages and disadvantages rather than lengthy background detail – *Taxi drivers also earn profits by doing tours.*

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and **situation** and candidates were very clear about what they were doing in this text. The intended **audience** was the local council, although some candidates did not seem sure whether this was a single person or a group. The **tone** and **register** were very well maintained this year by most and kept properly formal and polite to acknowledge the formal situation. The correct **format**, a formal one, was employed by the vast majority, although there were several versions of a formal report. Many strong responses featured a highly structured format with a heading, a date, a signature and also a sub heading and paragraph or section headings. Many adopted a formal letter style which was acceptable while weaker responses mixed the report and letter formats. Most candidates followed the structure provided by the bullet points for their organisation, sometimes together with a very short opening and closing paragraph, and this gave a sensible progression to their response. Overall, most wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1**, but it was very noticeable this year that there were many short responses in **Section 1**, even when an attempt had been made at **Section 2. Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when candidates suggested what could be done in **bullet point 3**.

Linguistically, most candidates produced a convincing piece of work and there was some very good vocabulary, for example *artisanal products*; *influx of sightseers*; and *the global economy*. Ideas were well structured with the use of markers such as *Firstly* and *Finally*.

Weaker responses included persistent use of the singular *tourist*, even though the plural word *tourists* was given in the task which often led to problems of agreement. Spelling was generally satisfactory but punctuation less so, especially with missing capital letters.

Section 2 Composition

Question 2

Describe two different possessions which are very important to your family – one which is useful and one which is for decoration. (Remember you can describe the possessions, how your family got them and why they are so important to your family).

This question elicited some interesting description, emphasising the importance of items associated with deceased family members and therefore looked upon with much love and affection. Some of the *useful* possessions related to cooking and other areas of everyday life such as transport – one or two candidates mentioned classic cars, owned by the family. The *decoration* items were again often linked to long gone family members, such as jewellery passed down from generation to generation. Fishing rods, bags, paintings and a medal were further examples and there was pride and excitement evident regarding the beauty of the items mentioned. Responses employed some rich imagery and explored the relevant narrative detail behind the possessions – *The pot began its journey down the family tree.....; charred black from the countless wars..* . Very few responses focused only on one possession, although sometimes the material concentrated much more on the first chosen possession. Responses focused on atmosphere and specific detail and how and why such items were of value. The fact that it was two possessions helped candidates to structure their answers as a contrast. Many candidates failed to notice however that one should be useful and the other decorative. There were also some misunderstandings noted, when *possessions* were taken as meaning *achievements, locations lived in* or even *the parents of the candidate*. Those candidates who employed the use of adjectives and the senses did well on this question. Much of the vocabulary was very good – *sealed, transparent... in a deep slumber* – but weaker candidates did rely on less sophisticated words such as *clean*.

Question 3

'People try too hard to be like other people. It is much better to concentrate on being yourself.' How far do you think this is true? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

In these responses, there was a lot of concern with so called role models and celebrities. Candidates were able to explore the topic with familiarity and confidence demonstrating their general knowledge and awareness of the world from a young person's perspective. It was generally agreed that young people spent too much time thinking about and trying to be something they were not and could never be. The focus was on the pressure of examinations and being an adolescent and how troublesome that could be. There was also concern for the many individuals who did not have a goal or ambition so, in effect, they had nothing to aim for in the future and so latched on to famous people who they wanted to emulate. This might be in terms of how the celebrity spoke, what they wore or even how they looked. What came through in the writing was a sense of frustration with this lack of originality and this desire to copy but an inability to find an alternative path. Many candidates highlighted the power and influence of social media as a form of relaxation but also acknowledged what a waste of time it could be and how damaging it could be in the wrong hands. Candidates wanted to be true to themselves, but it was felt that often individuals lacked the money, the confidence, or the willpower to see that through. The counter argument was that copying role models for the right reasons could be a good thing; persevering or showing generosity could be of benefit to all. Overall, this question was tackled effectively with balanced arguments. Candidates focused on their own personal experience and also stood back from the subject and discussed it in the third person. Strong feelings came through on contemporary issues such as mental health, insecurities about physical attributes and low self-esteem. A common phrase to sum up the ideal was *the best version of yourself*.

Question 4

'I believe everyone now should be forced by law to recycle.' What is your opinion? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

A knowledgeable minority of candidates demonstrated their interest and concern about the topic of recycling in their responses to this question. Some material from other subjects was used effectively here to provide examples and statistics. Some candidates used sophisticated terminology appropriately – *The societal pressure was...another dilemma*. Recycling was seen by many as fundamental to saving the planet and therefore it should be enforced by law. A few candidates were vociferous in the kind of punishments which should be issued should individuals break the law – *Companies should be more responsible....* There was concern for natural habitat, birds, and marine life and anger at the way many people polluted the countryside and the beach when we now have the ability to recycle so many of the items which used to be considered waste. Stronger responses discussed how this law could reasonably be enforced and soon saw the difficulty.

It was however encouraging to see the strength of feeling which the topic aroused. There was a strong call that we had to act now. Weaker responses could be repetitive, with some rehashing of phrases used in **Question 1** regarding litter and pollution. Good examples of arguments put forward were very helpful and strengthened candidates' responses to **Questions 3** and **Question 4**. Also, paragraphing which allows the argument to move forward logically, is vital in an Argument essay and is helped by appropriate paragraph openings, such as *On the other hand...*

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'It wasn't what the woman said to me but the way she said it which made me hesitate.'

This was by far the most popular title and seemed to appeal strongly to those who enjoy the horror genre. There were also romantic stories, thrillers, and supernatural tales. There were tales of intimidation; violence and rejected love; betrayal and friendship. The given sentence was invariably incorporated into the story successfully, whether it was placed at the beginning, in the middle of the story or at the climax. There were first person narratives and third person narratives. Endings were often unhappy and sometimes unfinished, although many were happy endings if the narrator escaped from their predicament. Whatever the outcome, the narratives were fast moving but often lacked description. The quote from the title encouraged the use of dialogue which brought life to responses – *Hey, you are finally here. Ready to leave?... Yeah. I was looking for you. Let's go.* It was generally employed correctly with candidates understanding the difference between indirect and direct speech. The woman in question was often seen as mysterious, powerful, or even dangerous. The narrator was often uneasy and suspicious and sometimes this caution was well founded. Occasionally the woman was a kind and a positive character. Stories suffered at times from a lack of realism and a desire to include too many events before the female protagonist appeared. Under timed conditions, simple stories with less plot work more effectively.

The best narrative responses are always characterised by an understanding of narrative structures, ambitious vocabulary, the control of tenses and by a variation in tone through the sparing use of dialogue. Weaker responses feature the opposite, a repetition of ideas, confused tenses and an overuse of simple sentence structures and vocabulary. Most candidates would have benefited from more variety in their punctuation, as long as it was accurate.

Question 6

Write a story about someone who moves back to their home town after a long time away and finds their new life there more difficult than expected.

This was a popular choice among candidates and, as with **Question 5**, there were very many first-person narratives, and this helped to give a sense of involvement in the drama. There were plenty of 'cautionary tales' about people leaving their communities to make it rich and then being forced to return in poverty and disgrace. A common theme involved a person returning from, for example, the US or UK to their country of birth, only to find that their lifestyle in Western society had ill prepared them for the need to be independent, and free from the luxuries they were used to – *Lazily pressing the snooze button...* Most of these individuals subsequently returned to their easier lives in the West. A few candidates were able to invent subtle stories about success changing people and causing them to struggle with the social/cultural requirements of their home town but the majority focused on failed attempts at success and the consequent struggle with menial jobs and poverty.

Candidates would benefit from more practice in structuring a story and are encouraged to explore variety in opening techniques to engage the reader, the problem/complication, the events/characters, feelings and the resolution/climax during their planning.

As for **Question 5**, the strongest responses demonstrated a clear understanding of narrative structures, an ability to use ambitious vocabulary and to control tenses and a focus on varying tone through the sparing use of dialogue.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21
Reading

Key messages

- Candidates are strongly advised to read both of the texts and all of the questions very carefully to make sure they know what is being asked and where to find the appropriate information before beginning to answer any questions. In both sections of the paper, concentrated reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.
- Candidates should pay close attention to the wording of every question when considering what information is required in response. To ensure their answers are focused, candidates are encouraged to underline or highlight key words, e.g. **Question 1(a)** ‘the problems associated with paper production.’
- Candidates are advised for **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** to focus on identifying the key overarching points from the text and avoid the unnecessary inclusion of examples or repetition. If examples are included, candidates should ensure that they make this clear, using ‘for example’, ‘such as’ or ‘like’. The use of brackets, dashes and slashes is to be avoided as these are not indicators of examples, nor is punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon.
- In **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, are reminded that their responses should be based on the passage and not on any additional knowledge they may have. Candidates should also keep looking back to the question to avoid additional unnecessary detail; candidates were asked in the second section to identify ‘problems associated with paper production’, therefore details about, for example, ‘technology’ to conduct business ‘electronically’ are not relevant.
- Candidates do not need to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**; if they choose to substitute a word or phrase, it must mean exactly the same as the original. While candidates should write succinctly and avoid copying lengthy sentences, they should also be aware that all key information needs to be given. Simply writing ‘Paper emits methane’ does not include the essential information that this happens when it ‘degrades’, for example.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there should be focus on clear expression; this will ensure a piece of writing that is easy to follow. Linking devices should be used to establish coherence. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as ‘moreso’, ‘to add on’, ‘the last but not the least’ should be avoided, as well as lengthy introductions, conclusions and personal opinions. Candidates should use a wide range of linking devices and use them appropriately. Accurate punctuation can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- For **Question 2**, candidates needed to identify three pieces of advice given in the text by the writer. The most successful responses used the writer’s words including all necessary details, for example, ‘We all need to think carefully’ in paragraph 5. In **Question 2**, candidates might be asked to identify opinions, advice, criticisms or warnings; they should carefully highlight the key word in the question.
- In the ‘own words’ questions, **Question 4(c)** and **Question 7(a)**, the most successful candidates avoided repeating the key words, or their derivatives, in their response and instead provided suitable synonyms or paraphrases which worked within the given context.
- In the multiple-choice vocabulary question, **Question 8**, candidates should be encouraged to look at the given words in the context in which they appear in the text.
- In **Question 9**, candidates are required to make a clear distinction between the ‘meaning’ and the ‘effect’ of the given phrases. Further practice in the approach to these writer’s craft questions would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to focus on the straightforward, literal meaning under ‘meaning’, and to differentiate between that and how this affects what the writer is telling us about characters, situations or places given the writer’s choice of particular words or images under ‘effect’.

General comments

Candidates answered questions based on two passages of approximately 700 words each, the first non-fiction, entitled ‘Paper’ and the second fiction, entitled ‘A Retirement Adventure’. The second passage appeared more accessible than the first. This led to some short responses to **Question 1(a)**.

If a response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number and part which is being continued. If a candidate uses space elsewhere on the question paper, they should write an explanatory note in the original response space. They should avoid using margins or squeezing answers into the bottom of the page. Candidates should be encouraged to clearly cross out previous attempts at a response, rather than try to rub out their words and write over the top.

The first passage explored candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second assessed reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary question: 12 marks for the assessment of the ability to select content points from the text 'Paper' and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a summary which was relevant, logically organised and easy to follow. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**, while some responses, which were in excess of the recommended length, were too wordy to achieve a high mark for relevance and less fluent in terms of coherence.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates used the suggestion in the rubric that they use bullet points for their notes, and that they do not need to use their own words. The most successful responses identified key overarching points, without the inclusion of examples, while recognising the need for significant details, for example that 'paper-making machines designed for bulk manufacturing' were invented or designed 'in Arab countries'.

Question 1(b) asked candidates to summarise their notes from **Question 1(a)**. The nature of a summary is the selection of the main points from a given passage without lengthy or unnecessary introductions and conclusions. The strongest responses rephrased and synthesised their content points fluently and coherently, moving from one idea to the next using a range of concise linking devices. Acceptable responses selected parts of the original passage, rearranging and adding to them, to ensure a coherence of their own.

A further question, **Question 2**, with three marks, assessed candidates' ability to distinguish fact from non-factual statements, in this case to write down the writer's advice from three paragraphs in the text. In answer to **Question 2**, a small number of candidates erroneously referred to the fiction passage. **Question 2** is always based on the first (factual) passage.

The second passage, 'A Retirement Adventure', assessed candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here, with the most successful candidates clearly focusing on retrieving information or inferring details from the passage in response to the questions asked.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the origin and development of paper production in former times, and the problems associated with paper production in modern times, as outlined in the whole passage. Candidates were asked to write their answers in note form, and they were free to use either the words from the text or their own words. The first content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration; these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Stronger responses identified 10 to 12 points or more and avoided the inclusion of examples, as in paragraph one: 'more and more uses of it were found' (a main point and noted); 'for example, the Song Dynasty' (either omitted or included with 'for example'). Careful reading of the text, perhaps underlining key facts and highlighting examples to avoid, would have raised marks for those who, for example, listed dynasties. It would also prevent this irrelevance being carried forward into **Question 1(b)**. Ensuring that key words are not missed, for example, 'secure storage of confidential data' is conducive to achieving higher marks, as will avoiding repeated points, for example the further explanation that making paper uses 'three gallons of water to produce a single sheet of paper' which repeats the given point.

The best responses focused on the key events in the 'Origin and development of paper production' in the first section and 'Problems associated with paper production in modern times' in the second section, rather than including specific uses of paper in former times or how useful paper is and how industry and business are working to avoid the use of harmful chemicals or decrease the use of paper in modern times.

Excluding the given content points, there were 14 content points available for selection. The best responses were expressed concisely, almost always in bullet points, with a large number of possible points offered. To gain 12 marks, candidates need to offer at least 12 main points over the 2 sections.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described the 'Origin and development of paper production in former times'. Excluding the first given point, there were nine content points from which candidates could choose in the first section.

Paragraph 1 contained the given point and three further content points. More skilled responses omitted details of the clothes left after washing and the residue, as this provided unnecessary further information about the given point, 'first production occurred in China and was accidental'. The first correct point was either that paper was 'deliberately manufactured' or 'manufactured for use by the military/army'. Strong responses showed evidence of careful reading and an awareness that the plants, old clothes and fabric were examples. The following point stressed that (the process of) papermaking was 'standardised' or 'systematic'. Stronger responses identified 'more uses for paper' as the final overarching point in the paragraph, without going into details about the dynasties creating money and tea bags, as these were examples.

Paragraph 2 contained three further content points about the development of paper production, showing how it spread from China. Stronger responses demonstrated an understanding that papermaking techniques spread to other countries without citing specific countries mentioned in the text, or explaining further about the Korean monk, both of which needed to be clearly indicated as examples if used. The following point demonstrated where an agent had to be included in the response, as in the 'paper making machines for bulk manufacturing' were invented or designed in Arab countries, making this latter an essential part of the key point. 'Paper mills sprang up across Europe' or 'paper' being 'made all over' Europe was the final point in the paragraph. The best responses included 'Europe'.

Paragraph 3 provided two content points. The first content point in this paragraph related to a change in the material used to make paper – only wood. Careful readers picked up the importance of 'only' here: 'wood was only used to make paper' (wood is used to make many things, including paper, furniture, building houses) is not an equivalent for 'only wood was used', which was the first point in the paragraph. Stronger responses recognised that the reasons for its use, cheapness and abundance, did not form part of this key point. The last development was the invention of machines to produce paper at speed.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the 'problems associated with paper production in modern times' with seven more content points across three paragraphs. This section appeared to be the more accessible of the two for candidates. Paragraph 4 provided the given point, that the papermaking 'industry is heavily reliant on water', as well as two further points. Successful responses focused on the key overarching points, realising that the information about gallons of water used was an example to prove this reliance, not a further main point. The second point followed on from the use of wood mentioned above, and 'trees/forests have been cut down', or 'deforestation' could be credited as an own words equivalent. The lack of diversity caused explained why this is a problem, rather than being a main point in itself. Stronger responses noted the next point, that the chemicals used to 'bleach paper' were 'harmful' or have 'become a source of environmental concern' but did not include the irrelevant detail that we prefer white paper, as this would have distorted the focus of the problem.

Paragraph 5 introduced more information irrelevant to the question – the use of paper instead of plastic – which is not a 'problem' in itself. The first point in the paragraph is a consequence of this increased production and use, as we throw away more paper, resulting in 'an environmental cost to filling our landfill sites'. Point 2 followed this by alerting us to the fact that 'when paper degrades ... it emits methane'; successful candidates appreciated that this toxic gas is only produced when paper degrades and so, correctly included this essential detail. The final point in this paragraph outlined an issue created by recycling paper, that 'de-inking/removing (printing) ink from paper uses chemicals which damage the environment or put more simply, 'recycling uses chemicals which damage the environment'.

Paragraph 6 included one final content point: the 'secure storage of confidential information'. Those who used the words from the text tended to gain this mark, as they demonstrated an awareness of the importance of all four parts to this point, without bringing in 'notes, files or reports', which were examples of how business uses paper.

Candidates could improve their performance on **Question 1(a)** by not listing examples and instead searching carefully through the passage for the overarching or main points in order to identify at least 12 points overall. Although points should be presented in their correct sections, the order within the section is not considered, so time need not be wasted trying to indicate which is intended to appear first with arrows or writing between

the lines. Those candidates who showed evidence of having read the passage with greater attention to detail and who followed the rubric of the question throughout were the most successful.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes from **Question 1(a)** to write a summary of the origin and development of paper production in former times, and the problems associated with paper production in modern times, as outlined in the whole passage. They were advised to write 150–180 words (the first 10 of which were given) and to use their own words as far as possible in a piece of continuous writing. Marks were awarded for producing a relevant, well organised and easy to follow summary. Most candidates completed the task to an appropriate length.

The strongest responses expanded the relevant notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising the material without including repetition, examples, or supporting detail. Judicious use of the 16 content points available in the passage avoided unimportant details and specific examples, such as how paper was discovered and its subsequent use to make money or tea bags. There were 10 marks available for highly relevant and coherent responses. Higher marks were achieved by those who did not include lengthy introductions to each section, a conclusion or repetition of the rubric.

The most impressive summaries included a wide range of relevant content points, clearly made. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question. Here, coherence was aided by the skilful and accurate use of a range of linking devices, the effective use of punctuation and adverbial connectives, as well as the correct use of complex sentence structures. Satisfactory responses effectively used simpler words such as ‘later’ or ‘then’, which served to show the development of paper historically and geographically, as well as ‘another’ problem or ‘in addition’, which showed the growing number of problems in modern times. Other responses relied accurately but somewhat repetitively on ‘and’, ‘also’ and ‘firstly, secondly, lastly’, with an occasional suitable adverbial link which aided fluency. Candidates need to move away from a memorised list of connectives which may not be appropriate and limit their ability to demonstrate a skilful level of fluency. There were a number of responses which lacked relevance, and which included only a few key points from the passage. Instances of candidates reaching the required wordcount by relying on examples or conclusions and personal opinion or knowledge of environmental issues were also observed, as well as instances of summaries which focused heavily on only one section. A few responses included points in **Question 1(b)** which had not been made in **Question 1(a)**; candidates are encouraged to include these in **Question 1(a)**.

Question 2

In **Question 2**, candidates were asked to re-read paragraphs 2, 4 and 5 and to write down one piece of advice given by the writer from each of these paragraphs. A mark was awarded for the identification of each piece of advice, whether copied directly from the passage or presented in the candidate’s own words. In this question, candidates need to separate factual information from the non-factual, as presented by the writer. To answer this question, candidates should seek to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, involving the writer’s opinion and what the writer believes should happen. On the whole, candidates appeared to have carefully re-read what they had written in response to **Question 2** to make sure the advice was complete and made sense, with many candidates successfully gaining full marks.

The first piece of advice in paragraph 2 was ‘Preservation of (these) historic books must be continued (if future generations are to appreciate them).’ The majority of candidates realised that this needed to be identified in full, since omitting ‘must’ changes the urgency of the advice, and changing ‘continued’ alters the fact that this preservation has already begun.

In paragraph 4, the writer advised that ‘Education about wood conservation should take centre stage in all (our) schools.’ Again, using all the relevant words from the passage brought best results. The most common incorrect response was ‘We are being urged to make and use less of it’, which is not advice from the writer but the writer reporting advice from others.

Paragraph 5 required candidates to select ‘We all need to think carefully (about) how we can minimise (our) use of paper.’ Successful candidates again realised the importance of not excluding key words within this piece of advice; ‘all’, for example, involves everyone and not just a section of society, while ‘need to think carefully’ involves consideration rather than a reduction in our use of paper.

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

In dealing with a narrative text, candidates will often encounter less familiar vocabulary and will be expected to show an understanding of figurative language and inferred as well as literal meaning.

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question asking candidates to select the relevant part of the sentence in lines 1 and 2 which explained what decision the writer's son had 'expected' his parents to make. The majority of candidates recognised that the son thought his parents would 'settle into a quiet life' or stay in 'the town where' they 'had always lived'. Many responses included both ideas, ensuring that all the relevant information was given. By carefully writing out the relevant part of the sentence they avoided stating that the parents had settled in a quiet town, which is not accurate.

Question 3(b) proved more challenging than **Question 3(a)**. Successful candidates understood that they were not being asked what he was proved wrong about – ruling out answers focusing on the son saying 'it's supposed to be the young who go off to far-distant places' – and understood that they needed to use this information together with the fact that 'within weeks the move had been made' to explain that the parents had moved/were about to move to a far-distant place. As neither the parents nor the island were mentioned in the question, successful responses wisely included full details of who was moving and where they were moving to. These also appreciated the difference between 'going' to an island and 'going to live in/moving to' an island.

Question 4

Question 4(a) was a literal comprehension question based on paragraph 2. It asked for two ways in which life was at first 'a delightful repetition of the holiday' they had once spent on the island. The majority of candidates correctly identified that the couple swam out 'every day'. The second point was more subtle: many candidates wrote that 'we had dinner (near the harbour) in a restaurant'; strong responses recognised that 'we remembered, knew or loved' was also required to reflect an understanding of the use of the word 'repetition' from the quotation in the question.

Question 4(b) was an inferential question, asking candidates to infer why they thought the bay was at 'eye-level' around the couple. Here candidates needed to use the context of the passage: the couple were swimming in the middle of the bay. Stronger responses demonstrated an ability to put oneself in the position of the swimmers and understand that from their position in the water, looking around at the bay, it would appear at the same level as their eyes, neither looking up at it nor down. Therefore, the answer was that the couple were swimming, or 'in the water up to their eyes/head/necks'.

In **Question 4(c)**, candidates were asked to explain in their own words what the writer and his wife would have to do to 'endeavour to gain approval.' The expected response related to the couple's unhappy trip to the restaurant and was a more general observation than getting into the restaurant or needing official permission to stay on the island. Many candidates wrote suitable explanations for 'approval': being 'accepted, liked or welcomed' or being 'trusted' or 'fitting in' with the islanders. 'Endeavour' proved more challenging; stronger responses observed that the couple would have 'to try' or 'make an effort' to fit in. Where candidates find the actual vocabulary difficult, they are encouraged to practise not repeating words from the given phrase, but instead to look at the context and attempt to put the given phrase in more broad terms – what could the writer be saying that the couple ought to do next?

Question 5

Question 5(a) required candidates to focus on paragraph 3. Another inferential question, it asked what the writer thought might happen to make him 'glad there was a hospital on the mainland'. Many candidates appreciated that close reading of the context gave clues to the required response: we had just been told about the 'baked dry earth' and the writer's 'despair' at 'getting a garden fork into it'. Then the writer says he is glad about the hospital. Stronger responses combined these ideas and suggested that the writer was worried about hurting himself while gardening or digging, or that he might hurt himself with the garden fork. Here, it was important to include context, rather than give a generic reason such as it is good to have a hospital in the area if people have an accident; responses should be based on ideas in the passage.

Question 5(b) was a literal comprehension question and as such could be answered successfully by careful and appropriate selection of the actual text. Candidates were asked to find two ways that showed the couple were 'puzzled'. The information could be found in line 19: 'Their bemused expression' and line 22: 'They shook their heads'. The majority of candidates effectively used these two ideas without also including unimportant details about the writer getting on with his work, which was not relevant to the couple's puzzlement, or the couple not saying anything, which was never explicitly stated in the passage. Weaker

responses focused on the couple leaning on the wall, but this was incorrect as the passage does not tell us whether they did this out of curiosity or if this was just a convenient place to stop their walk.

Question 6

Question 6(a) required candidates to infer what had happened to give the writer the impression that 'it always looked as though someone had rearranged the route'. Many candidates recognised where the information could be found, but just a few responses showed an understanding of the depth required here – not just that the flowers were 'higher', but why they were higher. Candidates needed to reflect on what made the flowers higher and infer that the flowers were higher because they had grown (overnight). This question showed the importance of focusing on key words in the question: 'What has happened?'

Question 6(b) required candidates to link a quotation, a 'short phrase', with the writer and his wife succeeding in their determination to become real islanders. The strongest responses recognised the link between the words 'succeeding' and 'determination' in the question and 'rewarded' and 'efforts' in the answer. All successful responses included words from the text, as the question asked for a 'phrase'. A few candidates focused on the couple deciding to become regular shoppers in the local market, which is what they did to try to become 'real islanders' rather than this proving a marker of their success.

Question 7

For two marks, **Question 7(a)** required candidates to explain in their own words how the café owner acted as a kind of 'impromptu counsellor'. Candidates should avoid recourse to all derivatives of the key words when answering 'own words' questions, for example, 'counselling' from 'counsellor'. Many successful responses explained that the role of the café owner was to give advice or help, without using the specific examples from the passage of the letters, legal advice or getting children into college. Only the very best responses managed a synonym for the more challenging 'impromptu', meaning 'unprepared' or 'unrehearsed'. Candidates who used the context of the café owner advising people without being qualified, showed an understanding of strong comprehension skills when faced with difficult vocabulary.

Question 7(b) required candidates to infer why they thought the café owner 'chatted about this and that' before asking people why they had come to see him. The best responses focused on the customer wanting help rather than the owner wanting his business to thrive; that the owner would want customers to feel comfortable or relaxed and therefore feel able to explain what they really needed.

Question 7(c) required candidates to link two words from the passage: the given word 'always', with one word used earlier in the paragraph. The majority of candidates chose carefully and wrote 'invariably' from line 36. 'Often', which was the most common incorrect answer, did not have the sense of 'all the time' given by 'always'. Careful question reading would also have avoided responses with more than one word or 'gradually', which appeared in the paragraph above rather than in paragraph 5.

Question 8

Question 8 tested the understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. Such contextual checking is all-important with this type of question as words can have different meanings when used in different circumstances. The clearest method of indicating the chosen word is to circle the correct letter at which it appears. If candidates change their mind, they are advised to show this by crossing through the one they do not want, rather than attempting to rub it out. If they further change their minds, they can re-write the letter to indicate their choice.

The most successful responses were **Question 8(b)** and **Question 8(d)** where the vast majority of candidates recognised 'starting' as closest in meaning to 'striking up' and 'plan' for 'tactic'. Almost as successful was 'frequent' for 'regular' in **Question 8(c)**. In **Question 8(a)**, 'suggested' was the most common wrong answer: this would have fitted the context, except we are told he 'objected gloomily', which made the son's words negative, a fact noted by those who correctly identified 'complained' for 'objected'. **Question 8(e)** proved the most challenging part to this question, but many candidates did recognise that 'cautious' fitted the context of 'wary'. 'Curious' was most frequently chosen by others; successful candidates had apparently paid closer attention to the context of the café owner chatting to the couple, as well as the 'wary' approach seemingly decreasing after the islanders were beginning to smile and greet the couple at the market, to reject this in favour of 'cautious'.

Question 9

This was the section dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft. Both **Question 9(a)** and **Question 9(b)** test the candidate's understanding of the meaning and effect of selected phrases. As mentioned before in 'Key messages', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question to ensure success. Many responses offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa. Meaning needs to look solely at the words in the phrase and provide synonyms or a paraphrase, within the context, of that part of the passage. It is important that candidates avoid using words from the quotations or any derivatives as these do not allow them to demonstrate understanding. Explanations of the effect need to focus on the language choice in the quotation and not the wider literal context of the narrative. Successful responses concentrated on how the writer had chosen to influence how their readers view the characters and places through their choice of language.

Question 9(a) directed candidates to 'all heads swung towards us' in line 12 which described the scene in the local restaurant. The key words in the quotation showed that responses for meaning should cover 'all' as well as 'swung towards'. The strongest responses recognised that this could be simply expressed as 'everyone turned to them', realising the importance of every customer turning, looking or staring. Meaning was more successfully answered than effect. Answers to the latter could have focused on the effect of the diners' actions on the writer (and his wife) or what it tells us about the locals. Stronger responses showed an appreciation of the fact that the couple would feel intimidated, awkward, uncomfortable or the centre of attention or even that they felt like outsiders, finding this idea in a later paragraph. Other responses focused on the locals being curious or wary of the newcomers, appreciating that 'hostility' or 'fear' were too strong. Candidates should be encouraged to move away from general comments about the reader feeling tension, or showing the drama of the situation, as these do not provide sufficient evidence to show candidates' comprehension of the writer's choice of words.

For **Question 9(b)**, the given phrase was from line 27: 'shafts of gold'. This proved far more challenging than **Question 9(a)**, with very few candidates achieving both marks. The best responses used the context of the scene in the street – passing through the streets to the morning market – to work out that the 'shafts' did not indicate mining in the centre of a town, nor that the 'gold' meant wealth, but that they are an image of the view seen by the writer and his wife while walking. Successful candidates realised that the phrase was about the light shining between the houses, principally the sun shining. This allowed them to see that the effect of the sunlight made the scene beautiful, or made the couple feel happy and relaxed, or feel the warmth of their new surroundings. A minority of candidates used the situation of the phrase, between descriptions of the flowers, petals or geraniums, to suggest the shafts were about the flowers. Whilst this was not accurate for the meaning part of **Question 9(b)**, this enabled candidates to reference the beauty of the image, making the effect part of their response creditworthy. Candidates are reminded of the value of paying close attention to the context and the sequence of narrative events in providing clues to words or phrases which may be unknown or difficult to decipher in this question. However, candidates should not simply describe what is happening in the story at that point, as this question is about the writer's choice of words or phrases to create images and not what happened in the story.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Reading

Key messages

- Candidates should try to gain a clear, overall picture of both the passages *and* all questions through close reading before they begin to answer each section. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.
- Candidates might find it helpful to underline or highlight key words in the question, e.g. **Question 3(a)** 'What was the first sign...' and **Question 8** 'Explain in your own words...'. This will ensure that their answers are focused and creditworthy.
- To achieve high marks for both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to focus on identifying, specifically, the main overarching points from the passage without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points.
- If examples are included in **Question 1(a)**, candidates need to identify them as such with the use of 'for example', 'such as' or 'like'. The use of brackets, dashes and slashes is to be avoided as these are not indicators of examples, nor is punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon. Examples of this are 'can be used on several devices (smart television, tablet or smart phone)', and 'the pre-release hype of films is accompanied by merchandise – clothes, stationery and gadgets'. The former suggests that only the three devices identified can be used to stream; the latter suggests that only 'clothes, stationery and gadgets' accompany the pre-release hype.
- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**, and substitutions are not always appropriate. Therefore, it is recommended that candidates keep close to the wording of the passage for **Question 1(a)**.
- While candidates need to be encouraged to write succinctly and to avoid copying lengthy extracts from the text when answering **Question 1(a)**, they must also be aware that brevity can exclude vital information. For example, the answer 'pre-release hype of films' excludes 'merchandise' and 'heightens excitement', thus neglecting the advantage of this aspect of cinemas.
- Candidates are encouraged to write to the recommended length in **Question 1(b)**; overlong or short responses are self-penalising since they cannot satisfactorily fulfil the criteria for Relevance or Coherence.
- For **Question 1(b)**, candidates demonstrated an understanding of the importance of linking devices to establish coherence; it is essential that these are appropriate and also used selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' and 'to add on', are to be avoided. Similarly, expressions such as 'moving on', 'in a nutshell', 'by the way' or 'alongside' are not appropriate for a formal summary. Many candidates would benefit from further practice using appropriate linking devices to enable them to move from writing a competent summary to writing one which is skilful or impressive.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to use their own words and original structures, and they should be discouraged from copying complete sentences from the text.
- Candidates should be aware that accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)**, particularly the accurate use of commas and full stops, can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- For **Question 2**, many responses successfully identified the pieces of advice in the non-fiction passage. Candidates should be reminded that **Question 2** is part of **Section 1** and refers to the first passage. Candidates are advised to copy the piece of advice exactly as it is given in the passage since attempts at paraphrasing can miss detail or include inappropriate alternatives. It was noticeable that some candidates were selecting opinions based on previous exam series. In **Question 2** candidates might be asked to identify opinions, advice, criticisms or warnings.
- To assist candidates in understanding Passage 2, regular reading of narrative texts and consideration of both explicit and inferential questions about characters and situations will help a great deal with all types of question in **Section 2**.
- There was evidence of misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the questions in **Section 2**. Candidates need to spend time considering exactly what is being asked. Simply lifting from the passage rarely works; candidates need to rephrase the text in such a way that the question is clearly being answered.

- In the ‘own words’ questions, **Question 5(c)** and **Question 8**, candidates are advised to avoid repeating the key words in their response, and instead provide suitable synonyms for the given context. They should also note that the answers lie in the given phrase, rather than in the events in the narrative.
- In **Question 9**, the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates should be encouraged to try out each of the possible words and decide which is the most appropriate in the passage with which they are dealing. Candidates are asked to circle the correct letter. Occasionally other methods such as eliminating the incorrect answers or writing the letter in the margin resulted in ambiguous responses which could not be credited.
- In responding to the final question on the writer’s craft, understanding of both literal and inferential writing is required. It was not always evident that candidates could distinguish between *meaning* and *effect*. Further practice on the approach to these questions would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to provide a straightforward literal meaning under ‘Meaning’ and for ‘Effect’ to go beyond the literal and comment on the impact or connotations of particular words or an image.

General comments

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, each of approximately 700 words: the first entitled ‘Cinemas and Streaming’ and the second entitled ‘A New Beginning’.

Many candidates attempted every question but there were also several candidates who offered no response.

Responses were, for the most part, clearly written. A few candidates who wrote to excess – in **Question 1(a)** particularly – wrote at the side or at the bottom of the page which can cause illegibility and should be avoided. If the response does not fit in the space provided, it must continue on an ‘additional page’ rather than being written in a random space in the question paper booklet.

The first non-fiction passage explored the candidates’ ability to read for ideas and the second fiction passage tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary **Question 1**, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates’ ability to select content points from the passage, ‘Cinemas and Streaming’. 10 marks were awarded for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Part of the skill of summary writing is writing economically; several responses exceeded the recommended word limit of 180 words.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they might find it useful to use bullet points for their notes. Generally, responses demonstrated selectivity in extracting the relevant information. Practice in identifying the overarching points would benefit those candidates who feel the need to copy extensively from the text. In these cases, candidates often incorporate irrelevance or run out of space – both resulting in a loss of potential marks.

In **Question 1(b)**, there were 16 content points, including the given points, which candidates could refer to. Points not fully made are acceptable in **Question 1(b)**. To achieve Bands 4 or 5 for Relevance, a wide range of points must be included. For Bands 4 and 5 for Coherence, the summary must demonstrate significant stretches of fluent and accurate writing, with minimal communication-impeding errors at Band 5.

A further question, **Question 2**, allotted three marks to the testing of candidates’ ability to read for ideas, in this case to identify three pieces of advice in three different paragraphs of the passage.

The second passage, ‘A New Beginning’, 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 remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Reading for Ideas

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the advantages of cinema and the advantages of streaming, as outlined in paragraphs 2 to 7 of the passage. Answers should be presented in note form and own words are not necessary. 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.

Excluding these two given points, there were 14 content points. Several responses achieved over 10 marks. These successful responses were expressed concisely, used bullet points as suggested and avoided repetition, unnecessary examples and additional information, while still ensuring that key words essential to making the point were included.

Less successful responses omitted overarching points and included irrelevant material, notably examples and repetition. It was not unusual for these responses to feature extensive copying from the text and then run out of space on the page.

Paragraphs 2, 3 and 4 described the advantages of cinemas and there were seven points (excluding the given point) which candidates could make. A few responses incorrectly expanded on the given point for their first content point, seemingly not recognising that the measurements of the 'huge screens' were irrelevant details. The first content point was the 'surround sound'. An alternative but more infrequent answer identified the 'speakers' which created 'the sensation of sound coming from all directions'. For the next point, several incorrect responses included the details of the furnishings provided by modern cinemas but did not specify the advantage that they provided a 'comfortable' or 'luxurious' experience.

In Paragraph 3, there were three further content points. Many responses successfully identified 'being part of an audience' or being 'collectively immersed' as an advantage, and also that going to the cinema was a 'memorable' or 'special' evening or occasion, with the acceptable additional detail of going with 'family and friends'. However, 'a shared experience' alone was not creditworthy since it provided no distinction between being part of an 'audience' and going with 'friends and family', a point made in the previous paragraph. The final point in the paragraph that cinemas offer 'escapism' or 'relaxation' was also successfully selected. Identifying the disadvantage of 'interruptions' at home could not score since it did not clearly identify the advantage of watching a film in a cinema.

The two final advantages of cinemas were found in Paragraph 4. Many responses successfully selected 'to be part of a long tradition'. Clarity was essential here, so 'a long tradition' alone could not score, nor could answers which included irrelevant details of the cinema's history from 'silent films' to 'computer-generated images'. For the last advantage, there were several ways this point could be made. A correct point had to refer to what happens 'pre-release' or before a film is released, with the added detail of 'hype' or publicity 'heightening' or increasing the 'anticipation'. Alternatively, 'merchandise before a film is released heightens excitement' was a valid point. While there were several ways to make this point, the main problem was that responses often omitted a key detail, such as 'pre-release' or 'merchandise'. Some responses featured text indiscriminately lifted from the passage and included examples of 'merchandise' without 'for example' to distinguish the examples of 'clothing, stationery and gadgets' from the overarching point.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the advantages of streaming as outlined in the passage, and there were seven content points, excluding the given point, to be found in Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7.

In Paragraph 5, there were three content points excluding the given point. The first point candidates could make was that streaming is 'cheaper'. A content point which then went on to discuss the benefit of this for low-income families was bringing in too much extraneous information. The next advantage was that streaming can take place on 'any device'. A few responses included the examples of 'smart television' or 'tablet' in brackets which meant that the point was not creditworthy. Instead, these examples of devices should have been identified as such with 'for example' or 'like'. For the next point, 'films' had to be specified and a general reference that streaming can be accessed in many places was incorrect, since the passage at this point is focusing on the advantage of watching a *film* in a range of places. If the examples of 'train' and 'café' were included, most candidates took their cue from the text and wrote 'for example'.

Paragraph 6 considered the advantages of streaming for busy people in general, not specifically 'waiters' or 'nurses' who are examples of people with busy time schedules. The first point which could be made was that streaming 'can be done at any time' and if the point went on to include further content, 'in the middle of the night', this had to be identified as an example. The following advantage of being able to 'serialise a film' was made succinctly in many responses.

In the final paragraph, Paragraph 7, two content points could be found. The first advantage was the opportunity to 'binge-view' or 'binge-watch', and if a candidate included further detail as to what is being 'binge-viewed', a 'series', 'film series' or 'episodes' were acceptable. To 'binge-view a show' or 'film' was incorrect since these do not necessarily continue over several 'episodes' in their original form. The alternative point that people could 'watch a whole series over a few days' was also acceptable. However, in

several cases, responses stated that streaming services ‘release each episode’ at once but did not clarify the advantage of this. Similarly, for the final point many responses explained that ‘cinema films... arrive in streaming services’ without identifying the advantage that people can ‘catch up’ on anything they have missed.

In **Question 1(b)**, responses which scored highly in **Question 1(a)** often scored highly on Relevance. There was a maximum of 16 content points, including the given points, candidates could refer to.

The most impressive Band 4 and Band 5 efforts were from responses which included a wide range of relevant points, made with clarity, and avoided unnecessary examples and additional details. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question.

Less secure responses, many relying on copying sections of the text, included irrelevance, such as details about the measurements of screens as well as offering unnecessary conclusions. These responses sometimes repeated points: having identified ‘surround sound’ as an advantage, some went on to explain the effect of the ‘speakers behind the listener’. Band 3 responses included at least half of the available points, while a limited range of points generally merited Band 2 or Band 1 levels for Relevance.

Candidates are advised to use their own words and those who did use them, together with some of their own constructions to link the main ideas, created a fluency which was easy to follow. The best responses demonstrated an impressive coherence using a range of stylish and skilful linking devices, including varied and appropriate adverbial connectives and original complex structures introduced by ‘which’ and ‘who’. Points were often synthesised, such as ‘a film can be streamed at any time, on any device and in a range of places’. The repetitive use of ‘and’ or ‘also’ to link content was also avoided in these skilful and impressive summaries, and punctuation was accurate.

in less successful summaries, it was common for some adverbial connectives such as ‘nevertheless’ or ‘likewise’ to be used incorrectly, and others such as ‘in addition’, ‘moreover’ and ‘furthermore’ to be placed at random or mechanically at the beginning of a new sentence. The quality of coherence was also impacted by awkward attempts to link points using phrases such as ‘by the way’, ‘on the flip side of the coin’ or ‘adding on’ which are not appropriate for a formal summary. The use of ‘next’ and ‘then’ is also a limited way to link content points. It is important for candidates to ensure that the continuation from the opening 10 words is grammatically accurate, thus aiding fluency and coherence. Weaknesses in grammar and punctuation impacted on the fluent presentation of points.

In **Question 2**, candidates were required to select and write down three pieces of advice, one from each of Paragraphs 3, 5 and 7. Although ‘reading for ideas’ has always been integral to this examination, identifying pieces of advice is new this year. It is important that candidates follow the rubric and ‘write down’ the advice as it is given in the text without omissions or additions. The key here is to identify structures which offer clear guidance and advice as to how individuals should act. Candidates should not automatically presume the modal verb ‘can’ is an indicator of advice. In these paragraphs, ‘can’ is used to suggest the possibility or ability to do something.

In Paragraph 3, we are advised to ‘avoid the temptation to buy too many unhealthy snacks in the foyer’. It was essential to include ‘in the foyer’ and ‘the temptation’ to highlight the prominence of these snacks in a cinema entrance, and ‘too many’ to suggest overindulgence.

In Paragraph 5, the advice given is to ‘wear headphones to avoid disturbing other passengers’ or ‘do not forget to wear headphones’. Any answers which brought in reference to train journeys or watching a film on a tablet were bringing in too much irrelevant detail and blurring the advice. Some erroneous responses included ‘you can use your account on any device’ or ‘watching a streamed film can be done at any time’, but neither is advice, but instead, observations of what is possible.

The final piece of advice in Paragraph 7 was ‘to sign up to a streaming service’, with the acceptable additional detail ‘for this very reason’. This addition could be substituted with ‘to binge-view’ or ‘to watch the series over a few days’.

Section 2 Reading for Meaning

Questions required an understanding of both explicit and inferential meaning, in addition to language and effect.

Question 3(a) was a straightforward question asking what was the first sign that the ferry was approaching land and nearly all candidates provided a correct answer: ‘the ferry sounded its hooter’ or simply ‘the hooter’. Because the question specifies the ‘first sign’, responses which gave the second piece of evidence (when a child announced that land was in sight) could not be credited.

Question 3(b) was another literal comprehension question asking why the writer and his wife were ‘thrown against each other’. Many responses demonstrated an awareness that the answer was in the preceding sentence but did not show careful selection – ‘the ship swayed’ – instead lifting the whole sentence, including the irrelevant detail about diesel-scented air.

To answer **Question 3(c)** correctly, candidates had to read the whole sentence carefully to locate the answer at the beginning. Candidates had to deduce that because the writer and his wife were ‘trapped’ between a lorry and a car in the hold, they could not see that ‘the harbour was in sight’ so they could ‘only assume that it was true’. Many unsuccessful responses described the lorry loaded with vegetables. It was also incorrect to lift ‘A child called out that the harbour was in sight’ because this put focus on the child rather than on the fact that the harbour could be seen, but ‘they assumed what the child said about the harbour being in sight was true’ could score. In some cases responses provided a detail about the couple feeling like outsiders which was incorrect.

Question 3(d) asked why the writer thought his wife to have ‘remarkable thought-reading talent’. The wife put into words the writer’s feelings and there were several ways the mark could be gained. The most succinct answer was ‘she said what he felt’ but other more detailed responses were also creditworthy: ‘he was thinking about being a foreigner when his wife said she felt like an outsider’. There were many partial answers such as ‘they both had the same thoughts’ or ‘they both felt like outsiders’, but these were incomplete without the idea of her verbalising his thoughts.

Question 4 asked candidates what was the ‘disaster’ the writer was referring to. The disaster was ‘not being accepted’, ‘not fitting in’, ‘being rejected’ or ‘having to leave at the end of the year’. Many responses stated that the disaster was leaving home and coming to live on an island, but there is nothing *disastrous* in this so was too general to be creditworthy.

Question 5(a) was an inferential question asking what had happened when ‘sunlight streamed into the hold’. The connection had to be made between their arrival and disembarkation, and being inside an enclosed hold of the ferry, and a small number of responses showed an understanding of this and correctly stated that a door or exit must have opened. The hold or ferry opened was too vague to be credited, as were the general observations that ‘they had arrived’, ‘it was time to disembark’ or ‘the sun rose’.

In **Question 5(b)**, candidates had to give the single word used in Paragraph 3 which conveyed a similar idea to ‘moved cautiously’, and the correct response was ‘edged’. A few responses included the whole phrase ‘we edged our way down’ but this was not creditworthy since the question asked for one word. If a candidate does choose to copy the phrase, they must highlight the answer by underlining, for example. Occasionally, ‘gangplank’ and ‘throng’ were selected but these nouns are clearly incorrect.

Question 5(c) was the first own word question and candidates were asked to explain how the behaviour of the passengers was blocking the entrance. The key lay in capturing the meaning of ‘unaware’ and ‘embracing’. Examples of correct answers were ‘not realising’, ‘did not know’ or ‘oblivious’ for ‘unaware’, and ‘hugging’ or ‘cuddling’ for ‘embracing’. Some incorrect responses repeated the words that candidates were required to explain or reflected an apparent misreading of the question as ‘Why were the passengers blocking the exit?’, explaining that they were being met by their relatives and stood in the way of the exit.

Question 6(a) was well answered with the majority of responses stating that the bus had been driven or crashed into a bin, but any suggestion that Nano, the bus driver, intentionally drove the bus into the bin was incorrect as there is no evidence of this. Furthermore, ‘bumping’ into the bin was too weak to score and ‘knocking over the bin’ was not possible because it was embedded in concrete.

Question 6(b) was a literal comprehension question asking in what two ways was the bus driver being attacked. This required close reading to score two marks. The first mark was awarded for the physical attack when a grandmother hit, or tried to hit, the driver with her walking stick. To simply write ‘physically attacked’ was an insufficient demonstration of close reading skills and understanding, as was a response which referred to plural ‘grandmothers’ or ‘walking sticks’. Some answers offered the textual detail that ‘grandmothers were shaking their walking sticks’ which was not creditworthy because there is no idea of ‘attack’ here. The second mark was achieved with ‘the grandmothers insulted him’. Again, attention to detail meant ‘the grandmother insulted him’ was incorrect. Acceptable alternatives for ‘insulted’ included ‘scolded’,

'abused' and 'mocked'. In both answers, 'old women' or 'old ladies' were acceptable substitutes for 'grandmothers', but 'people', 'she' or 'they' lacked precision.

Question 6(c) was an inferential question for which there were several possible correct answers for how the given phrase showed the bus driver's 'desperation'. A few responses perceptively identified the idea that 'it was impossible to move the bin', and a mark could also be gained by simply stating 'the bin is embedded in concrete' meaning 'no one could have moved it'. Incorrect answers focused on the literal details, particularly that he was lying or blaming someone else, or misinterpreted 'he cried' as 'he was crying'.

For **Question 7**, the passage tells us that the young man has metal cutters, and many responses demonstrated an interpretation of the 'strenuous work' that he was doing as 'cutting metal' or 'cutting the metal bin'. The opening sentence of the paragraph describes the bumper caught on the litter bin and more discerning responses demonstrated consideration of this scenario stating that the young man was more likely 'cutting away' or 'cutting out' the metal bin or bumper, or 'separating the bin from the bus'. Responses which stated that he was picking up the litter missed the textual detail of his 'metal cutter'.

Question 8 was the second question which required candidates to answer in their own words. The meaning of the key words 'eternally' and 'folklore' had to be captured, and, as with **Question 5(c)**, this had to be done within a sensible context. Synonyms for 'eternally' included 'forever', 'always', 'for a long time' or 'for generations'. A few responses described the events as 'etched' or 'carved' in the memory which was an impressive way to show understanding of 'permanence'. However, 'for the rest of his life' or 'for a while' were too limited and did not capture the idea of for eternity. Responses included a range of correct meanings for 'folklore': 'story', 'gossip', 'legend' and 'history'; 'villagers would talk about' was also creditworthy with its suggestion of the story being narrated among the community. A few incorrect responses shifted the focus from the given phrase in answers such as 'Nano would be humiliated' or 'the bus driver would lose his job'.

Question 9 tested the understanding, in context, of words in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. The most successful response was **9(b)** where 'crowd' was invariably chosen as a meaning for 'mass', with the very occasional candidate offering 'weight', suggesting they were not considering the word in context. **9(c)** was fairly well answered with 'said firmly' commonly selected for 'insisted', the clue being that Nano is repeating his declaration of innocence. A common incorrect answer for **9(c)**, 'said politely', showed misunderstanding of Nano's character. Many candidates correctly selected 'attention' for 'focus' for **9(d)**, recognising that the alternatives such as 'panic' would have made no sense in context. There was much success with **9(e)** by candidates who realised that the grandmothers were no longer attacking him and correctly selected 'stopped' for 'left off'. There was less consensus with **9(a)**, the correct meaning for 'squashed' being 'crushed'. The clue here is that the writer and his wife are in an enclosed space with a loaded lorry, a car and many other people. Candidates who selected 'pushed', a common incorrect answer, were possibly distracted by the writer and his wife being 'thrown against other passengers'.

Question 10 was the question dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft. In both **Question 10(a)** and **Question 10(b)**, candidates were asked to give, first, the meaning of a phrase as used in the passage, and then to give the effect of that phrase. As mentioned before in 'Key Messages', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question to ensure success. Many responses offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa.

Question 10(a) directed candidates to the phrase 'searched for something upbeat' which described the writer, and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Candidates had two words to focus on: 'searched' and 'upbeat'. To gain the mark an answer had to show understanding of the meaning of both words. For 'searched', the meaning could be 'tried to find', 'tried to come up with' or 'looked for'. For 'upbeat', acceptable meanings included 'positive', 'cheerful' or 'comforting'. Correct answers which earned a mark included 'looked for something reassuring', 'tried to find cheerful words' or 'hunted for something amusing'. However, 'tried to say' for 'searched for' was not acceptable since this is copied text while 'he wanted to say' lacks the idea of 'searching'. Some answers were partial and repeated the words in the phrase, such as 'searched for something encouraging' or 'looked for something upbeat'. Other incorrect answers focused on the events in the narrative: his wife is anxious and he wanted to comfort her; they have arrived in a foreign country; he told her they were explorers. Some responses went beyond the meaning and stated 'he looked for something to cheer up his wife' or he 'tried to find words which would make her feel better'. These are both incorrect because they have moved away from the literal meaning of the given phrase to the effect of the words.

The key to success in identifying the effect was to ask ‘what does the phrase tell us about the writer?’ and successful answers included ‘the writer is trying to comfort his wife’; ‘he is attempting to make her look on the bright side’; ‘he is considerate’; and ‘it shows the writer’s thoughtfulness’. All these creditworthy responses have moved away from the literal ‘what does the phrase mean’ towards an understanding of the writer’s character, and they also make it clear who is the subject: ‘the writer’. Responses such as ‘to comfort her’, ‘make her feel positive’ or simply ‘caring’ lacked focus on ‘the writer’ in the question. In some cases, the effect was misinterpreted as ‘what happens next?’, prompting incorrect answers such as ‘my words were drowned by the crashing of chains’.

Question 10(b) asked for the meaning and the effect of the phrase ‘a squadron of grandmothers’. The meaning was very well answered with the majority of candidates recognising that ‘squadron’, in this context, meant ‘a group’, ‘a crowd’, ‘several’ or ‘many’.

There was reasonable success with the effect of the ‘squadron’ comparison by candidates who asked themselves ‘what do a squadron and the grandmothers have in common?’ Correct answers included ‘they were ready to attack’; ‘they were intimidating’ or ‘threatening’; or they were a ‘team’, ‘united’, or ‘on a mission’. Incorrect responses did not respond to the analogy and gave answers such as ‘the grandmothers were angry’. This may be true but it is not an effect derived from the ‘squadron’ metaphor. As with **Question 10(a)**, in some cases, the effect was misinterpreted as ‘what is happening?’ prompting repetition of the fact that Nano had driven into a bin or the grandmothers were surrounding him.