

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/01

Composition

General comments

Examiners were impressed by the enthusiasm, vigour and focus of the candidates and the evidence in their work that they had received careful teaching and preparation for this examination.

The questions proved readily accessible to the candidates, achieved the required differentiation and provided clear opportunities for candidates to use imaginative and personal responses as well as more fact-based, discursive approaches if they preferred. In **Part 1** there was something for every candidate's level of interest and an opportunity to select a topic according to their particular skills and enthusiasms. The task in **Part 2** seemed to present few difficulties; for the most part, candidates coped well with understanding and fulfilling the requirements.

Some candidates did not always choose wisely in **Part 1**, sometimes attempting a topic or approach beyond their linguistic capabilities, where they had not got the range of appropriate vocabulary for the theme or were unable to cope with the abstract treatment of the discursive questions. However, Examiners were impressed by the fact that the vast majority of the candidates now write recognisable English; even though scripts may sometimes be full of single-word errors, communication is established and the intention can be understood. Very few really weak scripts were seen this year. As always, Examiners remarked upon the outstanding linguistic ability and ambition of the better candidates and noted the generally improved standard of this year's entry overall.

Questions 2 and 3 proved the most popular, especially for weaker candidates, who felt more confident in using the narrative or personal style but also with many of the more fluent candidates who engaged readily with the questions and expressed their ideas using sophisticated structures and some precise and apt vocabulary. **Question 5** was less popular, perhaps because, as yet, most candidates had little or no personal experience of interviews and wisely preferred to write on something closer to their lives - an opportunity presented in **Question 1** on the weather. **Question 4**, the ever-popular single-word topic, also attracted quite a number of candidates this year but, far too often, 'teamwork' and 'team' were confused, particularly by candidates who attempted a discursive approach.

Examiners reported that very few short or unfinished scripts were seen this year, suggesting an improvement in judgement and time management, clearly emphasised by teachers and practised in preparation for the examination. However, the problems associated with over-long scripts were much in evidence with many scripts in excess of 600 words, resulting in repetition of ideas and vocabulary, deterioration in linguistic accuracy and ultimately loss of interest to the reader. The use of time-consuming first drafts seems to be decreasing; however, there was little evidence of the planning of the overall structure of the composition in note form, giving direction to the argument point by point, or to the steps in the narrative leading to a planned conclusion, which would enable the candidate to retain the focus and impact of the piece, without digression or loss of pace.

Some linguistic problems persist, especially with verb-forms, tenses, sentence structure, subject/verb agreement and the use of correct punctuation, particularly in sentence division (though the use of the comma splice was less frequently seen this year) and in the indication and paragraphing of direct speech. Some candidates still cling to out-dated idiom - 'raining cats and dogs'; 'passing with flying colours' - or fail to appreciate its colloquial nature and the circumstances in which its use may be inappropriate: 'As my beloved grandfather lay dying, we held his hand and cried as we all knew he was going to kick the bucket soon.'

It was pleasing to note a decline in the use of text-messaging symbols, though 'u' is still much in evidence. More disturbing for Examiners was to see a greater use of bad language than previously found: 'I was really pissed off when we lost the match because we did not use a teamwork (sic) and our play was crap.' Candidates must realise that such language is offensive and always inappropriate in formal English composition.

The accuracy of spelling and improved clarity of handwriting was commended by many Examiners. In some Centres, casual scrawl, careless formation of letters and use of the expressly forbidden cursive fluid continue to break the easy flow of communication between writer and reader.

There were variations between Centres, as might be expected, but the overall standard of work produced by the candidates was impressive. The degree of personal engagement was high, in both parts of the paper, with a great deal of thoroughly competent, good work, some outstanding, original and effective writing and relatively few weak candidates, whose work was so poor that meaning was in doubt or linguistic error overwhelming. In fact, despite the criticisms, the overall quality of the scripts presented in this examination was very pleasing. Even the weakest candidates had something interesting to say, although they lacked the linguistic ability to express their thoughts accurately. Compositions were generally cohesive, paragraphed and written with personal engagement, original ideas and humour to interest, inform and entertain the reader.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Question 1.

Describe the best and the worst weather conditions that you can remember.

Most of the candidates who chose this topic wrote either about two separate occasions or about an occasion when the weather deteriorated, typically when a beach barbecue or outdoor party in pleasantly warm weather was followed by thunderstorms and torrential rain later in the evening. The best addressed the two parts of the question fairly equally and achieved a good sense of contrast, often effecting a balance between narrative and descriptive writing to produce a cogent and convincing piece, with concentration on the weather conditions and the writer's reactions. With candidates from so many different regions of the world, it was interesting for Examiners to note the interpretations of 'best' and 'worst' in the different areas. For some, the cool, breezy days or those of complete cloud cover compared favourably with the blistering, dry heat of the sun; others wrote of the blessings of rainfall, the delight of playing in snow or the excitement of a sudden downpour, whilst in other regions these were the worst weather conditions, leading to flooding, transport difficulties and structural damage. The best scripts concentrated on the sense of elation and depression resulting from changing weather patterns and the effect upon personal activities and mood swings. Many were able to include personal experience of drought or hurricanes. Some used the topic as a vehicle to introduce ideas of global-warming. In general, it was agreed that mild weather conditions were best and extreme conditions of any kind formed the worst weather conditions - and it was clearly easier to write on the worst than the best!

Inevitably, the topic led to the introduction of pre-learned (though relevant) 'purple' passages from previously practised descriptive writing, and weaker candidates ran out of things to say, concentrating on the activities taking place rather than on the weather itself to carry the topic. A number of candidates struggled with tenses, tending to switch inconsistently between past and present, an inconsistency which sometimes required quite a lot of re-reading to establish exactly what was happening. Expressions to convey the passing of time also caused problems: 'After a few minutes later ...' and 'As' for 'When' in constructions like 'As we were at the beach, the sky clouded over.' There was much confusion in spelling between 'weather' and 'whether', or even 'wether', and in expression between 'weather condition' or 'weather conditions' with consequent tense and agreement errors. Both these difficulties could have been avoided with more careful reading of the Question Paper.

Question 2.

'Young people are no longer interested in religion'. What is your view?

This was a popular topic attracting candidates across the full ability range and giving rise to a wide spectrum of personal views. Good answers were characterised by the presentation of a clear opinion in response to the question and a well-organised account of the reasons to support this. Almost everyone agreed that the statement was true, regretting the fact and bemoaning the lack of spirituality in the young people of today. In some impassioned diatribes against the worldliness of the younger generation, blame was laid on various aspects of 'modernised society': parents too busy to give proper guidance to their offspring; stern religious teachers and the rigidity of religious rules; the influence of western culture and technology, particularly upon

young girls, encouraging them to break the dress and behaviour codes in the name of fashion; the imitation of celebrities lauded in the media; false prophets and terrorists who deliberately misinterpret the beliefs and teachings of the various religions; peer pressure and the lack of time available for religion in the busy lives of the young people involved in school, parties, sport - and even homework!

There were also many cogently argued, well-balanced and thoughtful responses, some stressing the perils of not being interested in religion and emphasising the fact that most world religions share basic values and should be equally regarded and respected. Very few candidates actually supported the young people's view and admitted to sharing the lack of interest in religion themselves. Many weaker candidates had good ideas but not the linguistic dexterity to control the complexities of the language as they tried to explain their thoughts on the decline in 'interest' (sic) in 'religion' (sic) of their peers. Again, a more careful reading of the Question Paper would have helped. Others found they had insufficient material which inevitably led to repetition.

Overall, though, this proved to be a good question, accessible to all and evoking thoughtful responses to a topical situation.

Question 3.

Write a story in which you include the sentence: 'As I entered the room I saw what I hated most.'

This was the most popular question, perhaps because it offered the only immediately obvious opportunity to write a first person narrative, in which candidates could call upon their own experience. It was felt that the candidates who chose this topic really enjoyed writing some lively, engaging stories covering a wide range of subjects, characterisation and personal observation.

The given sentence appeared frequently at the beginning, followed by the 'flashback' technique or at the end as a 'cliff-hanger'. Some candidates chose to use it as a climax in the story followed by a quieter ending to the tale. The wide range of objects of hatred included an unpleasant or horrific situation or more tangible items like lizards, spiders, rodents and reptiles and unpopular individuals.

Although some candidates saw this question as an opportunity to re-hash a previously written tale and insert the given sentence somewhat randomly, this was often managed quite skilfully and relevantly. The best candidates actually used the given sentence as the basis of a well-constructed story. In many cases the sanctity of a teenager's bedroom had been invaded by a younger sibling and 'messed up' or unwelcome neighbours or long lost relatives were visiting. Other hated scenarios were faithless boy or girl friends with new partners or arguing parents who subsequently divorced.

Sometimes omitted articles could give a fractured style: 'I gave lizard hateful stare and went to throw it out of window.'

Tension was often well maintained, although there was the occasional grammatical lapse: 'Trembling with fear the door opened (sic) and with cold hands it gripped me.'

This composition required both direct and indirect speech, each offering its own challenge as far as tenses and punctuation were concerned. A common error was the confusion of the two: '*They asked me that "is that you outside the door?"*'; '*He said "that he was unable to attend."*' However, many Examiners commented that in some Centres, the direct speech in this narrative was both better punctuated and better paragraphed this year, making the essay more pleasing visually, clearer in meaning and, of course, much easier for Examiners to read and enjoy.

The narratives were generally well structured though sometimes over-long and, as with all stories, those based to some extent on personal experience and observation had the ring of authenticity, compared with some predictable and familiar storylines, which seemed to indicate that candidates had learned 'model' plots which could be applied when the topic allowed. In the first person narratives, there was added interest in the narrator portraying himself as the one who saw the hated sight and was able to give details of his reaction and response.

Question 4.**Teamwork**

Quite a number of candidates, especially the weaker ones, were attracted to this topic, which was open to such a wide variety of interpretations but also to a number of pitfalls, particularly the confusion between 'team' and 'teamwork' and the grammatical errors which ensued. A typical opening was: 'We all know what is a teamwork.' or 'Last week I and my whole class did teamworks.', followed by an attempt to discuss 'a teamwork' in the abstract, with some examples of situations in which teamwork had proved useful, such as in school projects, business projects, local government, cooperation on the sports field or in family life. Unfortunately, many candidates who had some understanding of the benefits and even possible disadvantages of teamwork, lacked the vocabulary and linguistic skills to communicate them clearly and the discussion became vague, confused, repetitive and lacking in interest. Some better candidates produced some thoughtful comments on what makes a good team with suitable examples. The saying, 'A successful outcome needs cooperation - you cannot clap with one hand' appeared fairly frequently.

A different approach to the topic was the presentation of a narrative of an event, usually a sport, in which teamwork was the key to success; however, too many told the story of the game with excessively minute details of every kick or stroke and little reference to the effect of teamwork except in the final sentence: 'This was the result of teamwork.' Better narratives stressed the unselfishness of a team approach and the ways in which candidates had worked with others on a group project for school or to improve the facilities of their neighbourhood, including a particularly good script which detailed the construction of a new house, with the teamwork of the different tradespeople contributing to the success of the finished building. For the most part, though, this was the title where too few ideas and a lack of vocabulary limited the achievement and the repetition was all too obvious.

Question 5.**Write a story in which an interview is important.**

This was probably the least popular question overall in **Section 1**. This was, perhaps, as previously suggested, because many candidates lacked personal experience to inform this situation. However, in some areas of the world, where this examination is taken by more mature candidates, there were some convincing, personal responses about job applications and the importance and anxiety of preparing and performing well in the interview, when employment was essential to support a family. In some cases candidates had to 'give an exam' before the interview but the point was made that paper qualifications alone are not sufficient and the importance of the interview was stressed. Candidates wrote of their fears, nerves and hopes and gave some detailed accounts of the interview itself and of rival jobseekers met whilst waiting to be called into the interview room.

Failure to read the Question Paper with care led some candidates to concentrate on saying, in general terms, why interviews were important and to forget to 'Write a story in which an interview is important.' Many of those who embarked on a narrative concentrated on the difficulties of the candidate actually getting to the interview on time. Delays occurred because: the interviewee overslept; an alarm clock 'did not ring-ring'; bad weather caused flooding on the road; the car would not start; an accident happened; the bus was late or took a wrong turning...the emphasis was placed on this chapter of accidents rather than on the importance of the interview, which in some cases was never described at all - but invariably the candidate got the job!

This was the composition where the use of good dialogue was most obviously needed but unfortunately where the need to punctuate and paragraph the direct speech caused difficulty and errors for many candidates. However, the organisation and planning of the narratives were generally good as the tales unfolded in chronological style. There were some memorable interviews, notably between a lawyer and a murderer in prison and when a lizard appeared in an interview room, scaring the candidate witless and causing him to lose the job.

Whichever approach was taken to the chosen topic and whatever the linguistic capability of the candidate, it was clear that the responses in **Part 1** had been written with some enthusiasm and enjoyment, and they were able to arouse similar interest and engagement in the Examiners, whilst at the same time allowing clear differentiation across the ability range. It would be advisable for teachers to give candidates more specific advice on the planning and presentation of descriptive and discursive writing in their preparation for the examination, so the candidates would feel more confident in choosing a topic other than the narrative, to show their appreciation of the world, sound ideas and linguistic skills.

Part 2.

The Directed Writing task was attempted confidently and enthusiastically by most candidates, with many able managing to achieve an appropriate register and format and make a strong and convincing case for the support of the chosen recipient of the prize. This success stemmed from the diligence of the teachers preparing their candidates, and probably from the familiar setting and terminology of the task itself. It proved to be very accessible in all the geographical areas of the world where this examination is taken and Examiners were unanimous in reporting that it had elicited some impressive work, generally more accurate than that seen in **Part 1**.

It is always important that candidates should spend time reading very carefully *exactly* what the tasks demand and nowhere more so than in **Part 2**, where the requirements were very clearly stated but surprisingly often omitted. Equally, it is important that candidates take note of the recommended length and relative mark allowance for the two parts and do not spend time writing 700 words for **Part 2**, which carries only 20 marks, at the expense of giving full weight to **Part 1** which carries 40 marks.

This task required a letter format, which many candidates produced most comprehensively, with a date and the addresses of both writer and addressee, (although these were often the same, for both candidate and Principal were at the school) and the Question Paper had suggested that no addresses were required, as candidates were advised to begin 'Dear Principal'. It was disappointing to see this become 'Dear Principle' in many cases....! A number of candidates chose their own salutations, using the Principal's name or 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam' and most included a suitable valediction and signature, although, as we see year after year, the spelling of 'sincerely', 'faithfully' and 'truly' was frequently wrong.

The tone of the letter was generally well judged, polite, respectful and persuasive, although the informality of 'By the way, how are you?' or 'Have a nice day' grated; and equally inappropriate were threats like 'I have made this decision so you had better act upon it.'

Some candidates were excessively polite, beginning each paragraph or sentence of the letter with 'Dear Sir'. The vast majority of candidates scored all five content points; those who named several, instead of 'a *particular* candidate' or omitted to mention the class, or failed to say *what* the prize should be, or did not say why '*this* would be a suitable reward' but simply repeated what they had already written about the special action of the chosen candidate, should blame their loss of points on careless reading of the requirements. Candidates who wrote to the prizewinner, or to tell the Principal about a prize already awarded in an inter-school competition, had also failed to read the instructions with sufficient care.

In the main, this part of the paper was taken very seriously and tackled thoughtfully and with interest. Candidates were involved with the situation and many letters seemed genuine. There were some imaginative situations described, with candidates gaining distinction for the school on the national or world stage in competitions (often written as 'competions') of various sporting or academic nature. Others did special work in decoration, building or cleaning the school, helped younger or disabled candidates, set up candidate councils or school-based charities or sought sponsorship for school projects from businessmen.

The suggested prizes (often written as 'prices') included scholarships, money, payment of fees, books, stationery, certificates, plaques (sometimes written as 'plagues') or a trophy ('troffee', 'trofy', 'throphey', 'tropehy')

The suitability of the prize usually hinged on the poverty of the candidate's family or to encourage the winner and other candidates to go on with the good work. Two unusual offerings noted by Examiners were a wheelbarrow and seeds for a hard-working school gardener and 'a posthumous (sic) award' to a candidate who had died saving the life of a classmate.

A number of candidates, particularly the weaker ones, produced a long but unbalanced letter, spending too long narrating the special deeds or achievements and failing to give sufficient detail on the type of prize or its particular suitability for that candidate. They clearly forgot the recommended word limits given on the Question Paper and certainly risked trying the patience of a busy Principal with little time to spare!

The letters were generally well punctuated and, as mentioned earlier, the majority of the candidates wrote more accurately and successfully here than in **Part 1**. The best answers began with an appropriate opening, expressing gratitude for being given the opportunity to express a view, thus setting a suitably polite and respectful tone for the Principal and for the task. Quite a number of letters were unparagraphed; it is important that teachers emphasise the need to paragraph the Directed Writing task of **Part 2** just as carefully as the composition of **Part 1**, when preparing candidates for this examination.

Several linguistic problems arose in **Part 2**. Tense control was difficult, particularly when there was uncertainty as to whether the recommended candidate was still at the school or had left, and agreement errors were also often found: 'This candidate gets a distinctions in his O Levels last year.'

There were errors in the use of pronouns: 'Celia Wong which is in Class 5 Science....' and the ever intrusive 'that' surfaced again: 'Sir, as you know that our school has had great discipline problems.'

'Althoughbut...', a sentence construction error, was frequently seen.

There was difficulty with the difference between 'to award' and 'to reward' and between 'eligible' and 'illegible'.

Some idiomatic errors were repeated: 'He was a topper' (meaning he was top of the class or the highest scorer in an examination); 'They were not able to meet both ends' (a mis-quotation of the phrase 'They had difficulty to make ends meet', meaning that they were poor). There was also difficulty in explaining how the school's reputation had been enhanced: 'He famoused our school's name'

Generally, however, this task enabled candidates of all abilities to develop clear, persuasive arguments to support their choices and to use the given information and vocabulary to lift the level of accuracy of their writing. It is a tribute to their excellent teaching and learning that so many of them were able to produce such coherent, careful answers.

Final Comments

As in previous years, the Examiners involved in the marking of these scripts have emphasised their appreciation of the clarity and accuracy of expression of many of the candidates and of the very high level of interest to be found in the essays, a testimony to the hard work and diligence of both teachers and candidates.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/02 Comprehension

General comments

This paper departed from the pattern of the last few papers by offering a discursive rather than a narrative passage. Nevertheless, it seemed to be accessible to most candidates and to engage their interest. This interest was borne out in **Question 8**, where very many candidates failed to score the available marks because they ignored the rubric and delivered impassioned pleas about ecology in general and the fate of dolphins in particular, presumably because they were moved by the topic. The majority of candidates attempted all questions and completed a summary of the required length.

The performance of candidates showed that, in general, they had been well prepared by their teachers and understood the nature of the examination. Almost the entire range of marks was seen. Examiners reported very few rubric infringements.

Candidates seemed to be familiar with the layout of the paper and, in the main, the types of questions likely to be asked. Almost without exception, candidates completed the paper, although not all managed to offer both a rough draft and a fair copy of their response to the summary question.

The paper followed the usual pattern. Twenty five marks were allocated to the testing of literal comprehension, inferential comprehension, vocabulary, use of own words and appreciation of writer's craft. A further twenty five marks were allocated to the summary question, these marks being divided between assessment of ability to select content points from the text and assessment of the ability to express these points fluently and in own words. The type of question giving most difficulty was the question which required candidates to answer in their own words; some candidates seemed to ignore this rubric or, even when they identified the key words for recasting, found it impossible to find synonyms. However, Examiners reported greater success than in previous years with the first and second of the three own-words questions on the paper. Examiners continue to report a pleasing reduction in the number of candidates simply ignoring the rubric instruction to use their own words. The other questions with which candidates found difficulty were the questions requiring an inferential answer and the question on the writer's craft.

Examiners reported that, where misinterpretations of the rubric occurred, these tended to be the result of careless reading of the questions rather than of any obscurity in the questions. Many Examiners reported an improvement in the methodology adopted by candidates in their tackling of the summary question.

A few candidates wasted time by copying out each question before answering it, or by copying out the entire stem of the question in their answer. A few candidates wrote in the margin of the paper: this made marking and correct totalling of marks difficult for Examiners.

Examiners continue to comment on the fact that many Centres still issue examination booklets containing many more pages than is required by candidates, and this results in waste not only of paper but of postage costs too.

As in previous examinations, many Examiners noted the neatness of presentation and handwriting, and the fact that spelling and punctuation were generally very good.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 was the usual relatively easy opening question designed to ease candidates into the examination. The answer was a reference either to the beauty or the intelligence of dolphins although if candidates infringed the rubric by offering both reasons, there was no penalty. This was fortunate for many candidates who, surprisingly, ignored the rubric and offered both intelligence and beauty as their answer. However, if the candidate offered several other reasons for dolphins' popularity, e.g. their being a symbol of peace, then the mark was withheld if the incorrect answer was the first one written.

A similar rubric penalty was in place in **Question 2(a)**. Dolphins were as important as human beings because killing a dolphin was punishable by the death penalty; if the candidate spoiled this correct answer by bringing in extraneous information, such as a reference to dolphins have a special place in folklore, then the mark was withheld. The majority of candidates scored the mark here.

Question 2(b) was the first of the three questions on the paper where candidates were required to answer in their own words. The key words were flagged up by reference to 'intentional harm' in the text; thus the words to be re-cast were 'ill-fortune' and 'mortal'. Synonyms such as 'bad luck' or 'trouble' were awarded for 'ill-fortune', while 'mortal' had to be re-cast with words such as 'deadly' or 'terminal'. Some candidates confused 'mortal' with 'moral' and offered incorrect words such as 'spiritual'; others confused 'mortal' with 'mental' and gave a wrong answer based on intelligence. A few candidates confused the meaning of 'fortune' here with the idea of money. More candidates scored the mark for 'ill-fortune' than for 'mortal'.

Question 3(a) was generally well done. The first use which dolphins make of their ability to make sounds is to communicate with each other, and the second is that they disturb the balance of their prey. Some candidates spoiled an otherwise correct second mark here by writing that clicking sounds disturb the balance of their prey, which was incorrect; the clicking sounds refer only to the first use dolphins make of their ability to make sounds. Others made reference to echolocation, which was also incorrect, although regarded as a neutral answer and not enough to destroy an otherwise correct answer.

Question 3(b) was the second of the three questions on the paper where candidates were required to answer in their own words, and it was generally well done. The question wording highlighted the trigger to the answer by putting 'leap high out of the water' into quotation marks, and thus led candidates to the key words for re-casting, which were 'indicate' and 'exuberance'. There were many acceptable synonyms for each of these words, e.g. 'show' or 'point out' for 'indicate', and 'fun', 'happiness' or 'excitement' for 'exuberance'. A few candidates spoiled an otherwise correct answer for 'indicate' by making a wrong link, e.g. by writing 'to show that they are there'; although a synonym for 'presence of fish' was not insisted on, the link had to be sensible if it was offered. More candidates scored the mark for 'indicate' than for 'exuberance'. Popular wrong answers for 'exuberance' were 'boredom' or 'to take a breath'.

Question 3(c) was intended to be a discerning question, and proved to be so. It asked for a 'single feature of the dolphins' environment'; very many candidates ignored, or misunderstood, the idea of 'environment' and offered 'echolocation' as their answer, which is a biological rather than an environmental feature. The correct answer was a reference to darkness or lack of light. Some candidates who seemed to understand the question spoiled their answer by writing more than one feature of the environment, most usually 'dark, watery world'; such rubric infringements did not score the available mark.

Question 4(a) was a relatively easy one where the majority of candidates scored the mark for making reference to the fishermen catching many fish, or simply by lifting from the passage 'bringing in record catches'. Some candidates clearly misunderstood the word 'record', reading it as a verb rather than an adjective, and failed to score because they wrote that fishermen were able 'to record catches', which made it seem as if an audio or written account was being kept, and was clearly incorrect.

Question 4(b) was similarly a relatively straightforward one, where the answer could be scored by lifting 'these methods make no distinction between fish and dolphins'. Where candidates failed to score here, it was usually because they wrote something that suggested that fishermen were intentionally netting dolphins for food, which was incorrect at this point in the passage.

Question 4(c) carried two marks, the first given for making reference to the monetary rewards of the tuna-dolphin bond, and the second for making reference to the fact that the tuna-dolphin bond catches large tuna. Lifting of the text at line 24 ('financially rewarding catches of tuna fish await those willing to take advantage of the tuna-dolphin bond') could score the mark, but candidates who extended the lift and included 'realising therefore that' were denied the mark because such a lift did not answer the question but was rather merely an observation. Similarly, the lift of line 24 ('particularly large tuna fish swim underneath dolphins') was

sufficient to score the second mark but the inclusion of 'fishermen have noticed that' denied the answer then became merely an observation. Most candidates scored the mark for reference to gain, but the more discerning mark for reference to the large tuna swimming under the dolphins was much less often. Some candidates lost the mark here because they wrote that large catches of tuna, rather than large tuna, was the benefit to fisherman, which is a distortion of the text. Others spoiled their answer by writing that the financial benefit came from selling dolphins as well as tuna, which is also inaccurate.

The level of difficulty was deliberately stepped up in **Question 5**. This was an inferential question in that each element in the question required candidates to make inferences by producing a 'mirror image' of the text. The answer to **Question 5(a)** was that in the past fishermen did not have strong nets, or that in the past dolphins were able to detect the nets of fishermen. Weaker candidates merely copied from the passage that modern fishing nets are made of strong materials, or that modern nets are made of material which dolphins can neither detect nor break. This did not answer the question, the focus of which was the past and not the present.

Likewise, in **Question 5(b)** candidates were required to make the points that in the past there was an ample supply of fish and that in the past fishermen did not have to compete with huge fishing vessels or international companies. Each of these answers was awarded one mark. Weaker candidates merely made reference to the present rather than the past by writing that nowadays fishermen are faced with dwindling supplies of fish and that they have to cope with competition from international companies. It was clear that many candidates did not know the meaning of 'dwindling' and were unable to work it out from its context.

The answer to **Question 6** was that the number of injuries sustained by dolphins after collisions with boats was unlikely to decrease because the number of boats was on the increase. Many candidates scored this relatively easy mark but then forfeited it by added excess information from lines 60-61 about the noise from boats interfering with dolphins' hearing. Candidates who choose to answer a question by lifting from the passage must understand that the inclusion of lifted material which does not actually answer the question will deny an otherwise correct answer. The negative dimension to this question, in that it asked why the number of injuries was unlikely to decrease, rather than likely to increase, proved difficult for weak candidates.

Question 7 was a question on the writer's craft, and proved to be a discerning question which was answered correctly by only the more able candidates. The writer's use of the word 'even' showed that the use of postage stamps to promote dolphins was very surprising. It was not sufficient to write that it was surprising, as the text made it clear that all the education methods listed were surprising; the key to answering this question correctly lay in the extremity of the 'surprise' element. The mark could be scored for writing that the Chinese government was doing all it could do, or that they were imaginative, or by making a reference to the pervasive nature of dolphin education. Correct answers had to refer to the measures being taken and not to the issue itself; hence answers such as 'they think education about dolphins is important' were not rewarded. Popular wrong answers here were merely a repetition of 'extensive measures' from the text, or the idea that postage stamps are 'also' used as a means of education.

Question 8 was the third of the three questions on the paper where candidates were required to answer in their own words and proved to be probably the most difficult question on the paper, which was appropriate at this stage. The question contained the trigger words 'tremendous harm to our environment' which focused the better candidates on the key words: 'arrogance' and 'ignorance'. Acceptable synonyms for 'arrogance' were 'pride,' or 'conceit', and synonyms for 'ignorance' were expressions like 'lack of knowledge' or 'being badly informed'. Popular wrong answers for 'arrogance' were 'selfishness' and 'thoughtlessness'. 'Ignorance' was sometimes taken to be not paying attention rather than lack of knowledge. As indicated earlier, very many candidates missed the point of the question by giving a general warning about ecology or preservation of the environment, a kind of mini-essay on green issues; such answers were inadmissible because the question told candidates that the answer was in paragraph 11. Furthermore, the question asked for the reasons given by the writer for the harm caused to the environment, which was designed as a warning against giving their own ideas, and a reminder that this was not an inferential question. Candidates who misjudged the nature of this question wrote about how we have shamefully treated the environment rather than outlining the reasons why, namely arrogance and ignorance. Many of these answers were unnecessarily long and consequently took up time that could have been more profitably used to answer other questions.

Question 9 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words or expressions from a choice of eight. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who correctly offered 'pleased' or 'made happy' for 'delighted', 'difference' or 'differentiation' for 'distinction', and 'accidentally' or 'unintentionally' for 'inadvertently'. Popular wrong answers for 'delighted' were 'impressed' and 'fascinated', and for 'distinction'

the idea of high achievement. A popular wrong answer for 'deliberate' was 'intentional'. Many candidates offering a synonym without checking the word in its context; correct answers here were words such as 'discuss' or 'talk about'. 'In vogue' could be recast by many correct synonyms, e.g. 'popular' and 'fashionable'; 'famous' was a popular wrong answer here. The least popular choices were 'prevalent', 'appalling', meaning 'horrific' or 'terrible', and 'overriding', meaning 'main' or 'principal'. Few candidates who chose 'heartened' offered a correct synonym; most misunderstood the context and wrote something like 'saddened' or 'unhappy', whereas the correct answer was something like 'encouraged' or 'cheered up'. Another popular wrong answer here sprang from an understanding of heart as the seat of the emotions, with words such as 'heartfelt' being offered; 'touched' and 'moved' were other popular wrong answers. Examiners reported a full range of marks in this question, but that in general it was less well tackled than the equivalent question in other papers. They also reported, as usual, a small number of candidates giving the question word in a sentence rather than trying to explain its meaning. As ever, there were some candidates who offered two or three synonyms for each word; such candidates must realise that only the first word offered will be credited. Another misconception among a very small number of candidates was that all of the words would need to be tackled, or perhaps that the best five of eight would be credited; such candidates must understand that only the first five attempts will be looked at by the Examiner.

Question 10 was the final question on the paper and was, as is customary, the summary question, carrying half the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to summarise the difficulties and dangers encountered by river dolphins, and the steps taken to protect them. A few candidates misread the rubric and wrote about the steps that should be taken to protect dolphins rather than the steps that have already been taken. Others dealt with the topic in a generalised way rather than outline detailed points about dolphin problems and conservation. As is normal, the rubric asked candidates to base their summary on just more than half of the original text, expressing content points as far as possible in their own words, using a maximum of 160 words, the first ten of which were given. They were to write in continuous prose, not note form. There were twenty content points, of which they could identify any combination up to a maximum of fifteen points carrying one mark each. Examiners reported that almost all candidates completed the summary question, often with a rough draft and a fair draft. However, there continued to be the incidence reported of candidates failing to cross out their rough draft, thus failing to make it clear to the Examiner which version was to be marked.

There were four content points available in paragraph six. The opening ten words were designed to ease candidates into the summary by leading them to the first content point, which was that dolphins become trapped in the nets of fishermen; the paragraph went on to explain that they are often caught on fishing hooks. If the candidate chose to give the more general idea that fishing equipment is dangerous for dolphins, without specifying the points about fishing nets and hooks, one mark could be scored. The paragraph went on to explain that dolphins are poisoned by pesticides used in agriculture and by factory waste; many candidates lost the available marks here by writing that pesticides and factory waste pollute rivers, without going on to make the link to the harm this pollution does to dolphins.

Another four content points were available in paragraph seven, the focus of which was the construction of dams. Dams prevent dolphins from swimming upstream to breed, they deprive them of food, they deprive them of fresh water and /or oxygen, and they isolate them into groups which cannot interbreed. There were varying degrees of success with these points; marks were denied to candidates who made the point that dams cause a lack of fresh water or oxygen without linking that to a problem for dolphins.

A further five marks were awarded in paragraph eight to candidates who wrote that dolphins are killed because their meat has medicinal properties, that they are killed or injured after collisions with boats, that the noise of boats interferes with their hearing and with their ability to find food, and that the turbulence from boats reduces their ability to navigate their territory. Although many candidates successfully made the points about dolphins being killed for medicinal purposes and in collisions with boats, there was less success with the points related to the noise and turbulence caused by boats. Other candidates lost a possible mark by writing that dolphin meat has medicinal purposes, without making the link to the resultant killing of dolphins, which was the focus of the rubric.

In paragraph nine, the focus of the summary moved from the difficulties and dangers encountered by dolphins to the steps that are taken to protect them. Marks were awarded to candidates who wrote that China has recognised dolphins as a protected species, that people have been educated through films/posters/stamps about the plight of dolphins, that fishermen have also been educated, that one factory now uses the dolphin as its trademark and that other companies have followed by using dolphins as their trademark, or by the creation of dolphin shoes, hotel etc. There was considerable confusion about the fact that a single factory is referred to in the passage but several companies; Examiners were precise about number here, and many marks were lost through lack of necessary precision.

Paragraph ten contained a further two content points: a nature reserve and a hospital have been built for dolphins. These were relatively easy points to score, and the main difficulty for some candidates lay in not being able to cover these points in the number of words available, or in using plurals instead of singular. Again, precision in number was necessary.

As is customary, ten marks were allocated to the style of writing in the summary question, where style was assessed according to how well the candidates were able to use their own words and the extent to which they were able to write error-free, continuous prose, using a variety of sentence structures. Examiners reported a full range of marks in the ability to break away from the words of the original text, varying from candidate to candidate and even from Centre to Centre. However, there were still some very weak candidates who lifted almost indiscriminately from the text, producing little more than a random transcript which scored badly on use of own words and, inevitably, did little to pick up relevant content points. Some other weaker candidates played safe by relying fairly heavily on the text wording, thus not scoring highly for use of own words, but in so doing they gained several marks for content points; these candidates stripped the passage down to essential details whilst rearranging phrases from it into a changed syntactical shape, and this proved to be a sensible tactic from the point of view of gaining marks. As in the past, it seemed that some candidates had been taught, or had decided, to adopt this latter strategy and, indeed, it may be a good course of action for candidates who are lacking in skill or confidence in the use of English. Candidates with a weaker grasp of the language lost marks through syntactical failure or inclusion of parts of the original text which were not relevant to the question. Only those candidates who were competent and confident enough to recast the original text, re-shaping it in original complex sentence, were able to gain many, or full, marks for style.

Common errors reported were the usual failures of agreement in singular and plural, misplaced or omitted prepositions, omission of definite and indefinite articles, and inconsistent and illogical verb tenses. Examples of common errors in the use of prepositions were 'killed by so small a reason', 'deprived from feeding', and 'dolphins lacking in food'. Common spelling errors were 'accidently' for 'accidentally', 'awarness' for 'awareness', 'goverment' for 'government', 'seperate' for 'separate', and 'suprised' for 'surprised'. Common agreement errors were 'construction of dams have led to' instead of 'has led to', and 'an important food source for dolphins are depleted' instead of 'is depleted'. As already indicated, spelling and punctuation were generally very good, and handwriting clear, although Examiners also reported problems with some handwriting being so small as to be almost illegible, and crossing out in the first draft causing problems with legibility in cases where the candidate had not written a second draft. One regrettable feature of some candidates' work was crossing-out in order to pare down the summary to the required length. This did not facilitate the marking process and sometimes removed words crucial to the sense.