

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, as indicated by the word **and** in bold type, there are two 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 not to exceed the maximum number of words in **Section 2**.
- Candidates should remember the importance of language, be careful with spelling and punctuation and check that tenses are consistent.
- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.
- The inclusion of violence and/or sexual content is not appropriate.

General comments

- Centres are to be commended on how well they have prepared candidates for examination. This is particularly the case given the issues caused by Covid-19. Candidates are also to be commended for completing the examination as successfully as in previous years. The vast majority of candidates were fully engaged with the questions and there were very few short or irrelevant responses.
- The strongest responses continue to demonstrate a high level of accuracy and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Vocabulary continues to be impressive, with many candidates using a wide range of vocabulary appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in terms of grammar for many, along with confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and incorrect usage of commas and apostrophes. Candidates should also avoid the use of slang expressions, e.g. *gonna*.
- A large majority of candidates performed well on **Section 1** with the bullet points being generally well addressed.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section 2** questions. All candidates appear to have been able to find a topic they were interested in writing about.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

This question required candidates to write a report about a careers day that had been held at their school. The following points had to be included:

- the positive aspects of the day for you and the other students
- how the day could be improved for next time
- what decisions you have made about your future as a result of the careers day **and** why.

For **bullet point 1** it was necessary for candidates to describe positive features of the Careers Day. The large majority wrote about benefits for other students, as well as themselves, as was required by the question. Most candidates performed well on this bullet point. Positive aspects that were described included

students being able to access expert advice on the career of their choice and students gaining career direction that they hadn't had before. The strongest responses contained detail about a few benefits, rather than a list of lots of ideas without expansion.

For **bullet point 2** candidates had to explain how the day could be improved for next time. There were a wide variety of improvements suggested and most candidates were able to clearly explain how these would help. Popular future improvements included students being taken to workplaces so that they could see for themselves what jobs involved, the provision of a larger space for future events, less crowding and the provision of refreshments. All of these were valid with the most convincing being those that were rooted directly in the idea of a careers day, rather than general school improvements.

A few candidates took too much of a narrative approach to the first two bullets and described what happened at the careers day, rather than focusing on the bullet points. Candidates who described the day but did not identify positive aspects or say what could be improved next time were not fully addressing the question. It is vital that candidates focus on the task bullet points throughout the Directed Writing task.

For **bullet point 3** candidates had to explain the decisions they had made about their future as a result of the careers day **and** why. Candidates had to address both parts of the bullet point in order to be fully credited for this point. The large majority of candidates did say why they had made the decisions they had and most did this successfully. A common approach was candidates saying they had been confirmed in their career choices thanks to inspiring testimony given by someone at the day. Other candidates wrote about how they had been inspired to work harder after careers day. The best candidates rooted their decision in what had happened at the careers day, rather than just saying what they wanted to do.

Sometimes candidates wrote about this bullet point in less detail than the others, perhaps because they had spent too much time on bullet points 1 and 2. All candidates were able to give some indication of what they wanted to do in the future, although this could be quite vague in weaker responses.

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. In this case, a number of candidates wrote overlong introductions about the events of the careers day that didn't address any of the bullet points.

Nearly all candidates included some aspects of the report format specified. The most common were those specified in the task, i.e. starting the report with *To the Principal* and also including their name and date. Most responses included other report conventions, e.g. a title, subheadings or numbered sections. Most candidates sustained the sense of a report fairly successfully in their responses and the best included appropriate touches such as the use of quotation and specialist language.

There was a good sense of audience in most responses, with candidates understanding that they were being asked to write a report for their principal and using appropriately respectful and formal language for this audience. Tone and register were appropriate in almost all responses, with the most successful responses using an effective style for a report.

The strongest responses employed a convincing tone and formal vocabulary. Candidates demonstrated their knowledge of this topic with words such as *motivated*, *passion*, *beneficial* and *insights* being used regularly. A few candidates did use inappropriately informal terms such as *gonna* and *kinda*.

Overall, spelling was satisfactory, with confusion of homophones being the most common mistake, for example in words such as *there* and *their*, *here* and *hear*, *passed* and *past* and *your* and *you're*. Frequent confusion in the use of tenses and articles was also observed. Punctuation was generally accurate although some candidates had weak sentence control and wrote in very long sentences. Others erroneously used the lower case 'i' when writing about themselves.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2

Describe the different views you have from two of the windows in your house which face in different directions. (Remember you can describe the atmosphere of what you can see, and any people you usually see there, as well as the views themselves.)

This was the least commonly answered of the **Section 2** tasks, but some candidates produced excellent descriptive pieces that really brought the views from their windows to life. Most responses included descriptions of two different views and there was often an excellent use of contrast, with an urban view from one window and a view of natural beauty from the other.

The best responses made skilful use of figurative language and adventurous vocabulary and there was good use of features such as metaphor and alliteration which brought descriptions to life. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like *serenity* and *vibrantly*.

Less successful responses relied too much on narrative, describing the events they could see, rather than the view. The language in these compositions was less precise with some repetition of vocabulary like *beautiful* and *interesting*. The control of tenses was often a weakness in these compositions. The present tense was used well by most but others used the present and past tense inconsistently.

Question 3

‘Having more freedom also means having more responsibilities.’ Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was the least popular of the two discursive tasks. Most candidates who attempted it seemed familiar with this debate and almost all agreed that having more freedom meant having more responsibilities. A commonly cited argument was that if you lived on your own you would be responsible for supporting and looking after yourself. Some candidates wrote about the dangers of having more freedom before being ready for it and how that might lead to unwise decisions. Other candidates wrote about how they were not allowed much freedom and the perceived unfairness of this. All approaches were acceptable. The best responses made convincing use of detail to support arguments made, with most based on personal experience.

The most successful candidates produced well-structured pieces, beginning with an introduction and often considering argument and counter argument, before finishing off with a conclusion. These responses also employed some impressive vocabulary including words like *maturity* and *consequences*.

Less successful responses struggled to advance a clear argument and sometimes became repetitive and unclear. In some cases, candidates did little more than advance an opinion without justifying it. Some candidates did not appear to have enough to say and might have been better served selecting another task.

Question 4

‘Social media brings as many problems as benefits.’ How far do you think this is true? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was the most popular of the two discursive tasks. Candidates who attempted it often did so effectively and there were strong opinions on the positives and negatives of social media. Most candidates appeared to be experienced social media users and this meant that they had plenty of examples to offer in support of their opinion.

Commonly seen negatives of social media included not knowing if people were who they said they were and the distraction of constantly getting updates. Commonly seen positives were being able to keep in touch with family and friends, being able to keep up with the news and the entertainment that social media can provide. Many candidates examined both sides of the argument and ended up taking a balanced view.

Most candidates performed well on this task. The familiarity of the topic allowed them to draw on their own experience and add detail to their argument. There was an impressive range of vocabulary, including words like *drawbacks*, *challenges* and *advertisement*.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: ‘When she asked why I was so nervous about going there, I didn’t know what to say.’

This was the most popular of all of the **Section 2** tasks. The sentence allowed candidates quite a lot of freedom to invent a scenario that created fear in the writer. The sentence could be added at any point in the story and many candidates used it as the precursor to the ending. Most candidates integrated the sentence convincingly into their stories.

Common themes included the candidate having to go back somewhere where they had had a bad experience or having to go back into school after they had done something wrong. There were also a number of ghost and haunted house stories. 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. A few candidates wrote responses that included violence or sexual content. This is not appropriate for an exam.

Less successful responses lacked detail and sometimes read as a series of events. A common language weakness was switching between the past and present tense, with the effect that the narrative became confusing for the reader to follow.

Question 6

Write a story about twins with very different personalities.

This was another popular choice. Most of the stories described scenarios with a very good and a very bad twin. Often one twin was an outstanding sportsperson and academically gifted while the other one struggled at school and sometimes turned to crime. A few candidates concentrated on describing the twins and so did not really develop a story.

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

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12 Writing

Key messages

- Candidates should think carefully about the required **format** for **Section 1**.
- Where introductory and concluding paragraphs are included in the Directed Writing, they should be as brief as possible, and they should not rely on a large amount of lifting from the question.
- For both of the Writing tasks, it is useful to refer to the band descriptors in the Mark Scheme as a guide to what is credited and what constitutes an effective response.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement and the correct use of direct and indirect articles 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 raise the level of most responses.

General comments:

Overall, the standard this year was about the same as in previous years. The very best candidates continue to achieve at a very high level indeed. This year, performance on Task Fulfilment in **Section 1** was high with the vast majority of candidates fulfilling the task in at least a satisfactory way. As far as the use of language is concerned there is still a need for candidates to check their work thoroughly, particularly with regard to the use of verbs, tenses and articles. This year, in **Section 2**, there was an increase in the number of candidates taking on the Argument titles. Time management for the vast majority was excellent.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Directed Writing

Question 1

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine they had won a prize they were not expecting to win. They had to write a school magazine article about what had happened. The majority of candidates responded very well to the **purpose** and **situation**. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points an answer needed to include:

- what they received the prize for **and** why they were not expecting to win it
- details of how other people helped them to win the prize
- how they would benefit from winning the prize.

For the first half of **bullet point 1**, successful candidates found it straightforward to specify what the prize was for. It could have been for just about anything, but the majority of candidates chose an academic or a sporting competition. Physics, Mathematics, Chemistry and Creative Writing prizes were very popular, as were rewards for debating, art and music, spelling, football and netball. The prizes were equally diverse: often it was the first prize but not always; sometimes it was a medal but sometimes a cash or material prize such as a laptop. Sometimes it was for an aspect of the competition, rather than the main prize, such as 'Most Improved Debater'. The second half of **bullet point 1** also brought many different reasons. Most candidates suggested they were not as good as their opponent(s), either through age or a lack of ability or because they had less time to prepare for the competition. Usually, it was clear *before* the competition that the candidate did not expect to win, possibly because of a sporting injury, but there were also occasions, usually in the sporting competitions, where a point was reached when the narrator was losing in a match and so not expecting to win *during* the competition, only for their luck to change. There were very few candidates

who failed to mention either what the prize was for or why they did not expect to win and therefore the majority made a solid start to their response.

A few weaker responses relied almost entirely on simply lifting (or giving a close paraphrase of) the opening two sentences from the question so that they merely said they won a prize. They may have said what the prize was but crucially they failed to say *what the prize was for*. Saying what the prize was for was more important than saying what the prize was; responses needed to state that it was won in a certain competition. Some response omitted the second half of the bullet point and so limited their achievement. A significant number of candidates had seemingly misread the scenario and wrote about a future event; this made it difficult for them to address **bullet points 2 and 3** convincingly.

Bullet point 2 was straightforward for the vast majority who gave an account of the help they received. Mothers and teachers were the main helpers, and both went to, often, extraordinary lengths to prepare materials, train the candidate in various skills and offer encouragement. Some candidates, aware that they were writing a school magazine article, thanked teachers and fellow students for being at the event to give support.

Stronger responses fully acknowledged the word *details* in the bullet point and included specific information about the actual help given as regards materials, advice and skills. Weaker responses sometimes consisted of a list of people who helped but were vague in terms of the actual help received. Weakest of all, were responses which ignored the words *other people* in the bullet point and only mentioned one person.

Responses that were successful in addressing **bullet point 3** were those acknowledging that the benefit from winning the prize should be something in the future. Some candidates did say that they were already benefiting or had benefited, and they could be credited for this. A money prize often helped the candidate to pay fees. A laptop helped with study. A medal brought pride to the candidate and the school. In sporting events, the benefit of teamwork was often an important element. Prizes from academic competitions would help the candidate to progress in further education and candidates gained self-confidence, knowledge and skills. Less successful responses were those which referred to how winning the prize would help *other* people, rather than the candidate themselves.

Generally, responses demonstrated a good awareness of **purpose** and **situation**. The intended **audience** was the school population, the students, teachers and parents. Virtually all candidate showed an awareness of this and some emphasised it by addressing students who had given support. The **tone and register** were generally very well sustained and appropriately formal and polite in acknowledgement of the slightly formal situation and adult readers. The **format** was a magazine article. The question encouraged candidates to supply a headline, and most did but there was a considerable variation in the effectiveness of that headline. Many were imaginative and precise, as in *Making and Breaking Records*. Some simply put *Magazine Article*, which was barely a headline. Many simply neglected to put a headline at all. Apart from the headline, some candidates did manage to incorporate other elements of a magazine article, such as subheadings, rhetorical devices, *Written by..* and a name to sign off the article, or perhaps a liveliness in the writing associated with such texts. Some responses incorporated a mixed or incorrect format such as a letter to the Principal.

In general, candidates followed the structure provided by the bullet points for their organisation, together with a very short opening and closing paragraph. Responses were not overloaded with narrative, despite the temptation in **bullet point 2**. In this way, responses tended to remain focused.

Overall, the vast majority of responses were of a suitable length for **Section 1. Opinion and justification** arose naturally when the benefit was suggested in **bullet 3**. There were very few short responses indeed in **Section 1**.

Linguistically, most candidates produced a solid piece of work. Spelling and punctuation were generally satisfactory. Paragraphing continues to improve in the **Section 1** task from year to year and so it did this time. In this text, there was some weakness in the use of tenses; these switched from paragraph to paragraph and from before the competition to after it.

Section 2 Composition

Question 2

Describe the scene at a busy roadside bus stop when the bus is very late. (Remember you are describing the place, the people and the atmosphere.)

The descriptive title was a reasonably popular choice this year as most candidates appeared familiar with bus stops and with the predicament of waiting for a bus which was late. Most candidates who attempted this title concentrated on the people and the traffic alongside the bus stop but less so on describing the bus stop itself. The people involved were generally students or people going to work. The increasing frustration of both these sets of people was effectively conveyed as candidates described the punishments awaiting students and the dire consequences for working people who were late. People shuffled about or tried in vain to shelter from the uncomfortable heat. Traffic was noisy and relentless. An atmosphere of increasing frustration, anger and hopelessness was evident. The best writing, often using the senses, included well-observed, specific details which made the situation vivid and real. One response described a bitterly cold morning at the bus stop and observed a mother trying to control her restless child; finally, the mother, *teeth chattering, draped a well knitted shawl* around her complaining child. At one point, a young man's documents were scattered and ruined by a sudden hailstorm. To the writer's delight, a group of handsome cadets passed by, one of whom started *an engaging conversation* with the writer.

Linguistically, as always, those candidates who could evoke an atmosphere by close description and the use of adjectives and the senses did well on this question. The range and precision of the vocabulary used by candidates was often excellent: *the adjoining street, strewn with...; ...children wearing white school uniforms.....like a flock of sheep...; and ...vociferous people always bargaining over the price of tickets.*

Question 3

'Schools should spend more time teaching practical skills which students may need in adult life, for example, how to cook how to repair a car and how to be a good parent.' Do you agree? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was a very popular choice. The majority view appeared to be that schools did indeed have a duty to include far more practical skills in the curriculum and that it would not be a problem to deliver the academic curriculum at the same time. A minority felt that, although it might be desirable, there would be too much time taken up in doing so. Some did hesitate about the idea of schools being able to teach good parenting skills and it was mostly felt that this was the job of the family. Essays were generally sensible and mature, and plenty of real-life examples were given. A fairly widespread viewpoint was that if there was no time for these skills to be taught during the school day, classes could be held out of school hours. Linguistically, these essays were particularly well structured and paragraphed as candidates used the various practical skills to frame their responses. The appropriate use of connectives, such as *furthermore, moreover* and *hence*, was observed in the strongest responses.

Question 4

In your community, there is a sum of money to build either a new school or a new medical centre. Which would you choose? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was not a popular choice and was answered by just a handful of candidates. There were, nevertheless, a number of well argued, solid answers here and candidates made good use of the obvious structure by giving the pros and cons of both a new school and a medical centre. Candidates could generally see the possible benefits of both options and so some balanced writing resulted. Opinion seemed to be roughly equally divided as to which new building would bring the most benefits. A medical centre would clearly answer immediate needs, but the school was seen as providing more long-term benefits.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'On that particular day, the whole building was unexpectedly quiet.'

This was the more popular of the two narrative choices and the most popular question of all the essay choices. In general, the given sentence was incorporated into the story very well with very few awkward changes of tense. There were a great number of straightforward, surprise birthday party stories. There were also many horror stories which owed a great deal to video games. The very best narrative writing had a freshness and personal quality about it. One such story, extremely well told, started with a call from the narrator's *workaholic* friend who had gone especially early to the office. The unusual quiet of the office slightly unnerved the writer and this unease intensified, until the narrator found the friend quite ill from overwork. There were poignant reflections on why she had had no inkling of any previous signs of distress. The story was told with restraint, which made it especially moving. Another very moving, maturely-told story

was about the death of a very dear friend *stricken by fever*. It was a beautifully written and restrained expression of loss, again creating a moving atmosphere. The mood was poignantly set by the opening sentence: *It was a cold and dreary morning the day my colleague, no, my friend, passed away*.

Such impressive essays are always characterised by an understanding of narrative structures, ambitious vocabulary, a control of tenses, as well as a freshness of storyline. Above all, it is the clever use of varied sentence types and lengths which makes the writing fluent and natural. Weaker responses tend to be characterised by a repetition of ideas, confused tenses and, particularly, an overuse of simple sentences.

Question 6

Write a story about an occasion when you had to say sorry to someone, even though it was a very difficult thing to do.

This was not as popular a choice as **Question 5**. Nevertheless, there were some very effective ‘apology’ stories. One concerned an encounter with *David the bully*, a notorious character whom everyone tried to avoid but who took the writer’s sandwich during break-time. The latter had been hoping *no beefy problems would happen* but of course they did and the narrator had to stand up to the bully. An admiring friend was heard to say *Man, that much courage for a sandwich*. Nevertheless, the narrator still had to write an apology. He was *bitterly annoyed* but wrote the note.

As far as language was concerned, most candidates would have benefited from more variety in their punctuation. With specific reference to dialogue, two points are worth remembering. First, if dialogue is added it should have a purpose – perhaps to show character in some way. Second, dialogue should be appropriately punctuated.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21 Reading
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Key messages

Before answering questions on the Reading Paper, candidates are advised to read the two passages and questions carefully. This process should help them to understand what is required in answers, and where to find the relevant information. Every question directs them to the paragraph or area of text where they will find the relevant material on which to base their answer. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.

- Candidates are encouraged to underline key words in the question, e.g. **Question 7(c)** 'Give one word...'. This will ensure answers are focused and creditworthy.
- In all answers candidates are advised to avoid the use of ellipsis (...) to shorten a response. Abbreviating in this way increases the risk of information essential to an answer being omitted. They should also avoid using brackets (which are read as part of the point being made), slashes or punctuation, such as a colon, to indicate examples. Presenting additional information in these ways risks confusing a main point. This is most evident in **Question 1(a)**.
- Candidates are advised for **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** to focus on identifying the key overarching points from the text without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points. If candidates feel they must include an example, they should ensure that they make this clear, using 'for example', 'such as' etc.
- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**; if they choose to, they need to be aware that when substituting a word or phrase, it must mean the same as the original. While candidates should write succinctly and avoid copying lengthy sentences, they should also be aware that key information still needs to be given. Simply writing 'Acrobatic traditions found in modern circuses' is insufficient as it does not convey the relevance to *in former times*, for example.
- The nature of a summary is the selection of the main overarching points from a given passage. Candidates are advised to avoid lengthy or unnecessary introductions and conclusions in **Question 1(b)**. When moving from the origins and development of circuses in former times to more modern times, a simple 'In modern times' would suffice to make this transition clear.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there should be focus on clear expression; this will ensure a piece of writing that is easy to follow. Accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)** can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates should use the question to help structure the response in two halves: here, the origins and development of circuses in former times, and the development and spread of circuses in more modern times. The wording of the question encourages a chronological structure.
- For **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to use linking devices to establish coherence. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' and 'to add on', are best avoided. Candidates should select linking devices which are appropriate to the task; 'however' and 'on the other hand' are more suitable to an argument with two sides than a chronological report such as this one. Many candidates would benefit from further practice using these devices in their summaries.
- Candidates are encouraged to practise recognising the difference between factual and non-factual statements in the non-fiction passage for **Question 2**. This question asks for non-factual statements, in this case opinions, given in the text by the writer. An opinion may form only part of the sentence and should be offered without the inclusion of additional information which might be a factual statement, such as 'and won several awards' in Paragraph 5. **Question 2** relates to Passage 1, not Passage 2. Candidates are advised to copy the opinion as it is given in the passage since own word attempts can miss some detail or include inappropriate alternatives.
- In the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates should be encouraged to look at each of the given words in the context in which they appear in the text.
- Candidates often experience difficulties with questions in which they are required to answer in their own words. This was seen particularly in capturing the ideas of being 'valiant' and having 'initiative' in **Question 4(a)**. This type of question will always give a quotation from the passage which contains the

ideas candidates have to explain. Candidates are advised to pay close attention to where this phrase or sentence occurs in the passage. This approach will help them produce responses with a clearer focus.

- In **Question 10**, candidates are expected to make a clear distinction between the 'Meaning' and the 'Effect' of the given phrases. Further practice in the approach to these questions on the writer's craft would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to focus on the straightforward, literal meaning under 'Meaning' and to differentiate between that and the 'Effect' of the *writer's use* of particular words or images. The focus should be on the word(s) in inverted commas.

General comments

Candidates are required to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction. Both passages, the first entitled 'Circuses' and the second entitled 'The Otter', were generally accessible to all.

If a response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number, part and, if appropriate, the section which is being continued. This is particularly important for **Question 1(a)**.

The first passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary question, **Question 1**, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the passage, 'Circuses', and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Candidates are advised to use their own words, as far as possible. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**. Some scripts which were in excess of the recommended length were self-penalising since they could not satisfactorily fulfil the criteria for Relevance or 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.

In **Question 1(b)**, credit is given for organised and relevant information presented in an easy to follow manner, using own words as far as possible. The strongest responses rephrased and synthesised their content points fluently and coherently. Acceptable responses selected parts of the original passage, rearranging them, to ensure a coherence of their own.

A further question, **Question 2** with three marks, tested candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion in two of the six paragraphs of the text.

The second passage, 'The Otter', 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

Question 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify the origins and development of circuses in former times, and the development and spread of circuses in more modern times, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on the whole text, and candidates were asked to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. Stronger responses identified all 12 points. In weaker responses, sometimes the points listed were not indicated as examples of the main points or were not relevant, and this irrelevance was carried forward into **Question 1(b)**. The strongest responses identified main points and avoided extraneous detail. Weaker responses omitted key words or repeated points. In both parts it was necessary to ensure that words essential to making the point complete were included.

Excluding the given content points, there were 14 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination to gain a maximum of 12 marks. Most candidates expressed the points in note form or in short sentences lifted from the text. Those few who presented long, verbatim copies of the text sometimes ran out of space and stopped short of covering all points. The best responses were expressed concisely, almost always in bullet-point form.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described the origins and development of circuses since ancient times and, apart from the first given point, there were five content points which candidates could make. With all these points, it was important to give the overarching features of circuses in former times, rather than individual examples.

The first correct point was that acrobatic traditions found in modern circuses were also found in former times; stronger responses identified this successfully. If a candidate chose to provide more detail, the addition of 'Ancient Greece', 'Rome' or 'medieval Europe' was permissible. However, candidates who wrote 'acrobatic traditions found in modern circuses' could not be credited since it distorted the relevance to 'former times'.

Paragraph 2 contained three content points further covering the origins of circuses and their characteristics. The first was that in Rome a circus was 'a building used for entertainment', which many candidates identified successfully. The second point described a feature of these circuses, that they were 'associated with spectacle'. This was all that was required, but many responses included details of how they were spectacular, citing the example of the sea battles, often without explicitly saying it was an example, and thus making the point uncreditworthy. The third point that 'circuses were social centres' or provided 'a chance to catch up with friends' again relied on recognising the overarching point rather than the example of the Hippodrome, which many successful candidates achieved.

Paragraph 3 provided one further point. Most candidates identified that circuses used 'comic characters' taken from the theatre, some giving the development of these as 'the clown'. Having made a correct point with a reference to 'comic characters', it was not unusual for candidates to offer 'the clown' as an additional point which could not be credited with an additional mark.

The second section of the summary asked for the development and spread of circuses in more modern times, with ten further points, the first being given. Paragraph 4 provided this given point: horse-riding shows were performed in a circle. The second point required the identification of 'traditional performance arts' or 'acts' as the next development of modern circuses, which stronger responses identified successfully. A few candidates successfully gave the idea of producing 'a whole show' as an alternative. Stronger responses selected the final overarching point of the paragraph, that 'types of performance venues' developed.

Candidates generally found Paragraph 5 the most accessible. It had four content points, the first being at the beginning of the paragraph, 'modern circuses spread to Europe', which some candidates combined succinctly with 'the circus craze reached the USA' for the next point as well. The more successful avoided the irrelevant details of the Amphitheatre Anglais in Paris and the President attending a circus in Philadelphia. The following point involved identifying the development of 'travelling circuses', which again could be succinctly combined with the extension of that idea to 'in many other parts of the world'.

The final paragraph, Paragraph 6, provided the last three points. The first point identified the use of wild animals in the circus. The next point was the consequence of changing public opinion regarding the use of animals – 'circuses evolved to provide entertainment based *solely* on human skills', with the complete exclusion of animals being key. The final point, combining 'traditional circus with modern theatrical skills', was also successfully identified by candidates who avoided the example of the 'Cirque Du Soleil'.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary of the origins and development of circuses in former times, and the development and spread of circuses in more modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were advised to write 150–180 words (the first ten 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.

The strongest responses expanded the relevant notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising the material without including repetition, examples or supporting detail. They also avoided irrelevant introductions to each section and unnecessary conclusions. The relevance of many responses was limited by detailing examples rather than focusing on main points. Stronger responses used their key points from **Question 1(a)** to include many of the overarching points from the passage.

The best responses demonstrated coherence using a range of skilful and accurate linking devices, including the effective use of punctuation and adverbial connectives, such as 'furthermore', 'in addition', 'moreover',

positioning them correctly within a sentence. Strong responses recognised that the passage did not have a 'for' and 'against' structure, thus negating the appropriateness of connectives such as 'on the other hand' or 'nevertheless'. Competent responses relied accurately, but somewhat repetitively, on 'and', 'also' or 'then' as links, with an occasional suitable adverb link; such responses were satisfactory in terms of their fluency. Weaker responses attempted to synthesise sections of the text using only commas, or chose inappropriately from a memorised list of connectives and were, therefore, less able to demonstrate a competent or skilful level of fluency.

Question 2

In **Question 2**, which continued to test 'Reading for Ideas', candidates were asked to re-read Paragraphs 5 and 6 and to give two opinions from Paragraph 5 and one opinion from Paragraph 6. A mark was awarded for the identification of each opinion, whether copied directly from the passage or presented in the candidate's own words. In this question, candidates need to separate factual information from opinion as presented by the writer. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the words were 'amazing' for the first opinion, 'sensational' for the second opinion and 'rightly' for the third.

The first opinion in Paragraph 5 was 'it is amazing the President/George Washington attended a circus', which many candidates identified, although some missed the key word 'amazing' which identified this as an opinion and not an historical fact.

For the second opinion, successful candidates identified that 'the film of that name' or 'The Greatest Showman' was 'sensational' and excluded 'and won several awards' which is a fact, not an opinion.

It was possible to give the opinion in Paragraph 6 in one of two ways: 'Public opinion *rightly* started to suggest that circus animals were being exploited', or the shorter version: 'circus animals were being exploited'. The key word in the longer opinion is 'rightly', without which it becomes a fact about public opinion and not the opinion of the writer.

Candidates are advised that opinions must be taken from the given paragraph in the first passage rather than their own opinions, as in responses such as: 'I think circuses are great'.

Section 2

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question asking what evidence there is to show that Hetta is 'not quite seven'. The correct response is clear in the passage: Hetta 'made up stories about Moonblossom' or 'the fairy', or 'the fairy I had invented as my companion'. A few candidates correctly identified that Hetta had an imaginary companion, using their own words successfully.

Question 3(b) was another literal comprehension question asking why Hetta did 'not mind' being ignored by her brother. This proved more challenging as the correct reference in the passage on line 4 required careful recasting to avoid 'It's hard to convey' which changed the focus of the answer. Successful candidates wrote he 'was special to' Hetta, some with lengthier, but unnecessary, explanations that 'as a small child she would have done anything for him' or that Hetta was 'used to it'. The fact that she was 'used to it' on its own – a common incorrect response – did not explain clearly why she did not mind.

Question 4

Question 4(a) was the first question to require the use of candidates' own words. They were given the phrase 'Besides being so valiant...Will had initiative' within the contexts of Will protecting her and finding somewhere they could swim. Candidates were asked to explain in their own words what this tells us about Hetta's impression of Will. It was necessary to provide own word alternatives for the words 'valiant' and 'initiative'. There was more success with providing a synonym for 'valiant', such as Will was 'brave' or 'a hero', than for 'initiative', with some erroneous focus on the idea in the previous line that Will was protective of Hetta. The context of 'initiative' came from the following lines, beginning with 'This was shown when...'. Correct answers included 'Will had clever ideas', 'he was resourceful' or 'he could make plans to solve problems', shown by him finding somewhere better to swim than the river by their aunt's house. Candidates are advised to note that, as there are two marks available, there will be two separate ideas to convey, both of which need re-phrasing. Many attempted either 'valiant' or 'initiative' but few candidates provided appropriate synonyms in context for both.

Question 4(b) was another literal comprehension question which asked why Will had to go five miles to find a place for them to swim. The key words were 'had to', meaning that he felt he had no choice. Successful responses focused on the inadequacy of the river near the house: it was only 'good enough for catching fish' or 'too shallow (for swimming)', rather than on the water downriver being deeper.

Question 5

Question 5, for two marks, required candidates to identify two reasons why Will carried Hetta on his back (to the swimming spot). For the first reason, candidates had to recast the text to focus on the fact that it was a 'long way' or 'five miles (further down the river)'. The second reason 'the track (was) very difficult to negotiate' was embedded within a longer sentence on lines 14 to 15, which described them building a dam using the rocks on the track.

Question 6

Question 6(a) asked candidates to explain in their own words the effect of the barking dogs on the otter, with reference to the words 'confused' and '(sense of) peril'. A variety of acceptable responses were given for 'confused', including that the otter was 'puzzled', 'did not understand' or 'did not know why' the dogs were barking, or it had 'lost its sense of direction'. Many candidates did not offer an explanation of 'confused' but went directly to the second part of the phrase, thus only giving themselves the opportunity of scoring one of the two marks available. Candidates are advised to offer two ideas for two marks, and they are advised to practise identifying the words within a phrase which need to be put into their own words. Here, the words were 'confused' and 'peril'.

Question 6(b) was another question which required candidates to infer Will's motivation for an action, in this case for using 'a kind of sling' to lift the otter out of the water. Successful responses demonstrated a clear understanding that the question was not asking why Will rescued the otter, which would have given answers such as 'to save it from the dogs', but why he had used the sling rather than his bare hands. These responses gave a variety of plausible explanations, including not wanting to hurt the otter, or to prevent it hurting him; to avoid touching the otter; to make it easier or to be more careful or gentle. To avoid dropping it because it was slippery was also a valid answer, but reference to the narrative detail of the otter's paws slipping was not acceptable.

Question 7

Question 7(a) asked candidates to explain what Hetta thought would happen if she kept crying. The answer lay in lines 27 to 28, but required careful selection of the key point, 'Will had a temper' and she was 'scared of rousing it', without Hetta 'was indeed quiet', which would have changed the focus of the answer away from Will. Responses needed to be explicit about who had the temper, or who was angry, as Will, or 'her brother', was not identified in the question.

Question 7(b) was another two-mark question asking for two ways in which the otter showed it was frightened. Successful responses identified the two actions in the passage: from line 28, it made a 'high-pitched crying sound', and from lines 31 to 32, its body 'made frantic twitches' or 'jerks'. Acceptable alternatives to 'twitches' and 'jerks' were that the otter 'shuddered' or 'rolled back its lips' in fear.

Question 7(c) required candidates to link a quotation with a single word used earlier in the paragraph. Many candidates successfully answered 'docile'. A few failed to follow the instruction to give 'one word'.

Question 8

Question 8 required candidates to explain why Hetta and her aunt played cards, even though they were both 'bored' playing the game. Part inferential, but also part literal, candidates had to look back to the previous line, line 35, to answer why they thought the aunt played: Hetta tells us all she wanted to know was 'what was happening at the vet's', meaning what was happening to the otter. Successful candidates used this information to explain that the aunt wanted 'to distract Hetta from what was happening at the vet's' or 'to the otter'. Many offered that the aunt wanted to distract Hetta without saying what from, or simply that the aunt was kind and wanted to keep Hetta company, which did not use the details from the passage. The second part of the question, why Hetta played, was much more successful. The answer lay in line 37, which many candidates made reference to: Hetta had been 'raised' with 'a strict regard for manners'. Some successful responses were given in candidates' own words, for example noting that Hetta wanted 'to show good manners', that 'it would have been rude not to have played' or 'out of respect for her aunt'.

Question 9

Question 9 was the multiple-choice synonym question where understanding of five words from the text was tested. Candidates are strongly encouraged to tackle this question by taking each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and comparing them. Such checking is all-important in this type of question as some of the possible choices have quite different meanings depending on the context. The clearest method of indicating the chosen word is by circling the correct letter. If candidates change their mind, they are advised to clearly indicate which response should be considered, and which ignored, by crossing through the one they no longer wish to be considered.

By far the most successful attempt was **Question 9(b)** where the vast majority of candidates recognised 'to save itself' as closest in meaning to 'for its life'. In **Question 9(a)**, 'passionately', required candidates to see beyond possible connections between 'love' and 'passion' to how 'strongly' Will cared; in **Question 9(c)**, 'rank' was often connected with 'grading', when in the passage it is the 'smell of fear' which is 'rank', meaning it is 'bad'. For **Question 9(d)** and **Question 9(e)**, the use of context to choose the closest meaning for 'spurned' and 'glazed' was also essential: the otter 'spurned' (the sardines) in disgust indicating that it would have 'rejected' them; the otter's eyes were 'open but glazed' after the vet had tended its injuries, and it 'made no effort to escape', so it was bewildered with 'unfocused' eyes.

Question 10

This was the section 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 sentence or part-sentence as used in the passage, and then to give its effect. As mentioned in '**Key messages**', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question. Some candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa. Explanations of the effect needed to focus on the language choice in the quote and not the wider literal context of the narrative.

Question 10(a) directed candidates to line 26: 'Will 'snapped' at me'. Many candidates identified that Will had spoken to Hetta, but only a small number described the way he had spoken, which is key to expressing the meaning of 'snapped'. To successfully paraphrase 'snapped', focus needed to be on either speaking 'abruptly', 'tersely' or 'bluntly', or the more general 'angrily', or silencing Hetta 'abruptly' or 'angrily' etc. The verb 'shouted' indicated that Will had spoken to Hetta, but still required candidates to say how he shouted: 'abruptly', 'angrily' etc.

For the effect of the sentence, successful responses explained that 'snapped' showed that Will was 'impatient', 'annoyed' or 'irritated' (with Hetta). A small number of candidates offered an acceptable alternative that Will was 'anxious' (about the otter), so 'snapped' at Hetta. Others successfully inferred that at that moment Will was being 'insensitive' or 'quick-tempered'. Successful responses explained what the use of the word 'snapped' suggested to the reader about Will and his state of mind, not the effect on Hetta. Answers such as 'Hetta stopped crying' or 'she became quiet' showed a misunderstanding of the question.

For **Question 10(b)**, the given phrase was from line 28: "Swaddled' in the towel", referring to the otter. Many candidates gave the meaning successfully as 'wrapped', 'covered', 'rolled' in the towel, showing that someone had taken the trouble to carefully wrap the otter, rather than it just lay on or under the towel, or it had hidden itself.

This idea of the care given to the otter successfully expressed the effect of 'swaddled', a word often associated with babies, suggesting that the otter was being treated 'like a baby', 'carefully' or 'gently'. Acceptable alternatives were that the otter was 'vulnerable' or 'fragile', or Will 'cared' for the otter, or had 'sympathy' for it. Again, the effect was how the use of 'swaddled' created an image for the reader or affected us, rather than how the otter felt at that point in the passage. Greater focus on the impact of the individual words, rather than considering them in the wider context of the passage, may help candidates see beyond the literal and identify the idea or feeling the writer wants to suggest.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Reading

Key messages

- Candidates should try to gain a good, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions 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 key words in the question, e.g. **Question 6(a)** 'Explain in your own words', or in **Question 7(a)** 'Give the word...'. This will ensure the 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 text 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 they are not indicators of examples, nor is punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon. Examples of this are 'avoiding plastic wrapping (for food)' and 'difficult to get rid of: burning increases carbon emissions', which cannot be regarded as overarching points.
- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**; however, when substituting a word or phrase, it must be appropriate. While candidates need to be encouraged to write succinctly and also to avoid copying lengthy sentences, they must also be advised that brevity can exclude key information. For example, 'voluntary groups remove plastic' misses the key detail 'from beaches'.
- In **Question 1(a)**, it is not necessary for candidates to restrict themselves to a maximum of 12 content points. They can, in fact, offer more than 12 points and each one will be considered on merit, even though the maximum number of marks is 12.
- In **Question 1(b)**, the focus is on clear expression; this will ensure a well organised piece of writing that is easy to follow. Candidates should use the question to help structure the response in two halves: problems associated with plastic and possible solutions.
- 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)**, it is essential that linking devices are used appropriately and selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' and 'to add on', are to be avoided. Many candidates would benefit from further practice in using these devices to enable them to move from writing a competent summary to writing a summary which is skilful or even impressive.
- Many candidates still find it difficult to distinguish between factual and non-factual statements, such as opinions, in the non-fiction passage. The opinion might be only part of the sentence and should be written without the inclusion of additional factual information, such as in Paragraph 5, 'Indonesia has introduced a tourist tax'. **Question 2** relates to Passage 1, not Passage 2. Candidates are advised to copy the opinion as it is given in the passage since own word attempts can miss detail or include inappropriate alternatives. The opinion needs to be written in full and ellipsis avoided.
- In the own word questions, candidates are advised to avoid repeating the key words in their response, and instead provide suitable synonyms which work within the given context. Narrative background detail is unnecessary and does not answer the question.
- In **Question 8**, 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. Candidates are asked to circle the correct letter.
- In responding to the final question on the writer's craft, understanding of both literal and inferential writing is required. 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. The focus should be on the word(s) in the inverted commas.

General comments

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, each of approximately 700 words: the first entitled 'Plastic' and the second entitled 'Sylvia'.

Responses were, for the most part, clearly written. A few candidates who wrote to excess – in **Question 1(a)** particularly – found themselves writing at the side or at the bottom of the page which can cause illegibility, and this should be avoided. Sometimes it was unclear where individual content points began and ended which can impact on the awarding of marks. If the response needs to continue onto additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number, part and, if appropriate, the section which is being continued. This is particularly important for **Question 1(a)**.

In **Question 1(a)**, there were a few instances of candidates putting information in the wrong section. In **Question 2**, a small number of candidates referred to the fiction passage.

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, 'Plastic'. 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. Candidates are advised to use their own words, as far as possible. Most candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates wisely adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they use bullet points for their notes.

A further question, **Question 2**, allotted 3 marks to the testing of the candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion in three different paragraphs of the text.

The second passage, 'Sylvia', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their ability to select appropriate quotations, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here, where there was a range of questions, some of which everyone was able to deal with and others, more challenging, which stretched the candidates.

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 problems associated with plastic, and possible solutions to the problems, as outlined in the passage. The summary was to be based on the whole text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding these given points, there were 14 content points. Few candidates achieved over 10 marks and only a small number gave the maximum number of correct points. These successful responses were expressed concisely, using the suggested bullet points and avoiding repetition, unnecessary examples and additional information, ensuring at the same time that key words essential to making that point were included.

Less successful candidates found it difficult to distinguish the overarching points from the details in the passage and offered irrelevant material, notably the inclusion of examples and repetition. Examples of such are given in dealing with the individual points below.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described the problems associated with plastic, and apart from the first point, which was given, there were six points which the candidates could make. Just one of these was in Paragraph 1, which developed from the given point about people's ignorance of the threats of plastic, and several candidates correctly identified a problem being people's lack of knowledge about how many products are

made of plastic, with the focus on the 'wide variety' or 'large number' of products. Occasionally, a response was not creditworthy because the candidate wrote 'lack of knowledge about plastic' without reference to the vast number of products made of plastic. If any product was mentioned, such as chewing gum or paper clips, then it had to be introduced with 'like', 'such as' or 'for example' to separate it from the overarching point.

Paragraph 2 contained two content points about the disposal of plastic. Candidates were successful in identifying the first point and there were two ways this could be expressed: plastic disappears or degrades slowly, or plastic is resistant to natural processes of degradation. Providing an example, such as a plastic fishing line, without it being clearly identified as one, would make this point incorrect. The second content point was that plastic is difficult to get rid of. Here, many responses consisted solely of an example about burning or burying plastic, which could not be credited. If a candidate lifted from the text to give the overarching point with an example, they had to substitute the colon with 'for example' etc. which few candidates did.

There were three content points in Paragraph 3 which all focused on the impact of plastic in the oceans. The first point that plastic kills or destroys marine life or sea creatures was succinctly identified by many candidates. However, having successfully identified the overarching point, some responses went on to include one or more bullet points which were, in fact, examples and incorrect: fish are entangled in nets or they are choked by plastic bags. Credit could only be given for a correct overarching point with an additional example if the example was clearly indicated as such. This meant that candidates who lifted lines 14 – 15 from the text could not be credited. The next problem to be identified was the danger of plastic to species which are already at risk, threatened or endangered. Responses such as 'species or sea creatures risk extinction' were too vague, missing the crucial detail that these creatures are already vulnerable. A common error was to make reference to endangered turtles without identifying this as an example. To score for the final point in this paragraph, two details needed to be included: first, sea life ingests plastic, and second, this plastic can end up in the human food chain or on our plates; most candidates successfully included both.

The second section of the summary focused on possible solutions to the problems caused by plastic as outlined in the passage, and there were a further eight content points, excluding the given point, to be found in Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

The focus of Paragraph 4 was the way in which companies and manufacturers tackle the problem. Those who made reference to cowardly governments and lazy consumers were straying from the question. The first solution after the given point was to avoid plastic packaging or use paper packaging and this was often correctly identified. Some candidates went on to make reference to food or supermarkets without identifying these as examples so the mark could not be awarded. Similarly, the reference to a large technology firm using paper packaging for smartphones is also an example. Many candidates identified the next solution in the paragraph that stores or supermarkets charge for plastic bags. Lifting lines 29 – 30, 'a charging policy has led to a drastic reduction in plastic bags', was also an acceptable, though less common, answer. Any reference to Germany and the United Kingdom had to be identified as examples. There were many ways for candidates to score with the final point in this paragraph, but the key idea to be identified was making or producing a product without using plastic or using a combination of plastic and other sustainable materials. Although there was much success here, some answers were incomplete, such as 'using a combination of plastic and other sustainable materials' where it was unclear who was using this (manufacturing firms) or for what purpose (to make or manufacture a product).

Paragraph 5 considered the global efforts made to solve the problem of plastic; therefore, it was essential to identify 'international' environmental agencies for the first point. An example of such a group, Greenpeace, was given and stronger responses either omitted this example or identified the group as such with 'for example'. The second solution in this paragraph was the passing of laws to reduce plastic. While some candidates stated this succinctly, the point was often spoiled in two ways: a reference to Canada, the UK and Taiwan, and the addition of 'prohibiting the use of microbeads' without them being identified as examples. Several candidates offered a separate point explaining microbeads and where they can be found which was incorrect. For the final point – a tourist tax is used to clean up plastic or litter – many correct answers were provided, with the occasional omission of 'tourist' losing the mark.

The final paragraph included two points, both about the way individuals can help solve the problem of plastic. The first of these points was the reduction of plastic being brought into the home. 'Home' or 'household' was essential to distinguish this point from the solutions in the wider world, such as the earlier references to paper packaging or the plastic bag charge. Examples in the text, 'using soap, instead of shower gels in plastic bottles', were incorrectly offered as content points in some responses. The final point was often neglected or candidates omitted detail. A correct answer required not just the idea of voluntary groups, but also what they do and where – they remove plastic from beaches or the countryside.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary of the problems associated with plastic, and possible solutions to the problems. They were advised to write between 150 – 180 words (the first ten of which were given) in a piece of continuous writing which was to be relevant, well organised, easy to follow and in their own words, as far as possible. Most candidates wrote to the required length. A small minority of candidates relied too heavily on the original passage instead of their notes, giving a summary which was close to verbatim.

Candidates who scored highly in **Question 1(a)** were often able to transform their notes into a relevant summary which did not rely on excessive copying of the text. The most impressive efforts were from candidates who expanded the relevant notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising the material without repetition and the overuse of unnecessary supporting detail. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question and also avoided lengthy and irrelevant introductions and conclusions.

Candidates are advised to use their own words and those who did use them, together with some original and accurate constructions to link main ideas, created a fluency which was easy to follow. The best responses demonstrated an impressive coherence using a range of skilful and accurate linking devices, including the effective use of punctuation, adverbial connectives and original complex structures introduced by 'which' and 'who', to create a summary which was not just accurate, but also stylish. 'On the other hand' and 'however' were often sensibly used to move from the problems of plastic to possible solutions. It was not unusual for some adverbial connectives, such as 'similarly' or 'whereas', to be used incorrectly, and others, such as 'in addition', 'moreover' and 'furthermore', to be placed repeatedly at the beginning of a new sentence. The quality of coherence was also occasionally impacted by awkward attempts to link points using phrases such as 'pursuing this further', 'on the flip side of the coin' or 'adding on'. Some candidates made no attempt to link the content and the result was a succession of simple or compound sentences which read rather like a list.

Question 2

In **Question 2** candidates were to select and write down three of the writer's opinions, one from Paragraph 2, one from Paragraph 3, and one from Paragraph 5. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the words were 'amazing', 'Incredibly' and 'beautiful'. Generally, candidates found this task challenging.

A few candidates correctly selected 'a plastic fishing line takes an *amazing* 600 years to degrade' from Paragraph 2. A common incorrect response was that 'plastic is difficult to get rid of', but this is a proven fact.

A very small number of candidates identified the subjectivity of the adverb 'Incredibly' in Paragraph 3, with most candidates instead incorrectly selecting 'It is estimated' and 'there is concern' which are not opinions.

There was more success with the opinion in Paragraph 5 that 'Indonesia is a *beautiful* country'. Successful responses selected the opinion and excluded the factual information that Indonesia has many tourists who pay a tax.

There was a small number of candidates who offered their own opinions rather than the writer's opinion, as required by the rubric, or provided a summary of the content of each paragraph such as 'In Paragraph 3, the writer tells us about plastic in the oceans'. Own word alternatives, although acceptable, are best avoided because they rarely provided appropriate alternatives for all the details. Some responses were incomplete and only identified the subjective words such as 'amazing' or 'beautiful'. Others neglected to include the subjective word and only mentioned 'plastic has been found in Arctic ice'.

Section 2 Reading for meaning

Questions required interpretation and appreciation of the writer's skill, and regular reading and discussion of fiction will help a great deal with all types of questions in this section.

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question asking why the post as librarian was Sylvia's first real job. Most candidates correctly identified that 'she had previously been working as a volunteer'. It was also correct to state that 'she was now getting paid' or that 'previously she was unpaid'. This was well-answered with only a few candidates misunderstanding the time sequence and suggesting that she was a new graduate.

Question 3(b) was another literal comprehension question asking why Sylvia was 'disappointed'. There were several ways to answer correctly, including that 'the books she introduced remained on the shelves' or that 'no one read her favourite books'. Lifting could provide a correct answer but too often lifts were vague or incomplete, such as 'their covers as pristine as on the day she had unpacked them' which excluded a reference to books and the fact that Sylvia introduced them or that they were her favourite.

Question 3(c) was the first question requiring candidates to answer in their own words, and the key words to be substituted were 'expert' and 'recreational tastes' for two marks. For 'expert', candidates needed to show that they understood that the senior librarian was 'very familiar with', 'knowledgeable about' or 'fully understood' the 'recreational tastes'. There was reasonable success with this. 'He knew about' or 'he understood' were insufficient since they did not convey that he knew 'everything' or 'a lot'. Furthermore, to write that he was 'professional' or 'a master' did not demonstrate enough understanding of the context. Similarly, his experience in the job or that he had worked there for many years were simply narrative details.

There were several possible synonyms for 'recreational tastes', including 'the reading choices' or 'the interests' of people in the town, and many candidates gave a correct answer. The 'likes and dislikes' or the 'choices' of the people lacked context so were not creditworthy answers. Instead, candidates had to provide clearer context: 'what people liked to do in their spare time' or 'what people disliked reading'. It was important that an answer did not rely on the words in the question; this meant that 'tastes in books' or 'an expert at knowing' were both incorrect, but 'he was an expert at knowing fully' was acceptable, with 'knowing fully' earning the mark. Nearly all candidates appreciated the need for context.

Question 4

Question 4(a) was a literal comprehension question asking why the rent was 'justifiably low'. Candidates could make the general observation that the cottage was in 'poor condition' or refer to a specific detail, including lifting from lines 10 – 13: 'orange stains of damp'; the paint was flaking'; 'clumps of weeds' in the garden. 'Low quality' was not acceptable because reliance on the word in the question failed to demonstrate full understanding. Similarly, speculation about the cottage's age or that it was small could not score. Many incorrect responses focused on her 'low' librarian's salary and the fact that the cottage was all she could afford which failed to answer the question.

Question 4(b) was another literal comprehension question referring to the one feature which made the cottage seem 'picturesque' and this was generally well answered by candidates who identified 'the view of hills through the kitchen window'. Since the question referred precisely to a 'feature' of the cottage, a correct answer had to refer to the 'kitchen' or 'window'. A small number of candidates only referred to the view from the kitchen window but did not say what the view was of.

For **Question 4(c)** candidates had to infer which items were Sylvia's 'most prized possessions' and the text provided the evidence when we are told that the cottage lacked a 'bookshelf on which to house her most prized possessions'. While many candidates correctly identified her 'books', several responses incorrectly identified the missing 'bookshelf' or 'the windowsill' as a prized possession. Noting the plural form of 'possessions' should have also been seen as a helpful prompt.

Question 5

Question 5(a) was a literal comprehension question asking for evidence which showed that Sylvia loved reading. There were two marks available for this question and three alternative answers. The first possible answer that Sylvia read at night or under the bedclothes by torchlight, was easily identified. There was also much success with the second answer that every Saturday Sylvia visited the library. Few candidates selected the final alternative answer at the end of the paragraph which was that characters in fiction became her allies, friends or shaping influences. Some candidates turned their attention to Miss Jenkins and consequently lost sight of the question giving incorrect answers such as 'Miss Jenkins would set aside books' or referring to the 'special bond' Sylvia shared with the librarian. That she was an only child who spent much time alone was also not enough justification for her love of reading.

Question 5(b) asked candidates to describe the emotion Sylvia's mother felt as she did the housework. The key was understanding the implications of the phrase 'made a martyr of herself' which was instead often given as an incorrect answer. Although many candidates could recognise that the mother had negative emotions, very few could appreciate the significance of the phrase and its suggestion of 'self-pity', 'resentment', 'feeling burdened' and/or 'frustration'. Meanwhile, words like 'tired' or 'angry' were too far from these ideas and could not be credited.

Question 5(c) asked what had 'practice in dealing with her mother's changing moods' helped Sylvia to do. Careful reading of the question and understanding that the answer required a focus on something active ('helped Sylvia to do') was required. Several candidates answered that 'it made her easy-going' or 'friendly' which was insufficient and more about Sylvia's nature and personality. Strong responses demonstrated a realisation that a translation of the negative phrase 'she was not without friends' to 'she made friends' would provide a focused and correct answer.

Question 6

Question 6(a) was the second of the questions which required candidates to answer in their own words and, with reference to 'Sylvia had a dreaminess that vexed her teachers', explain how Sylvia's teachers felt about her. The meaning of the key words 'dreaminess' and 'vexed' had to be captured, and, as with **Question 3(c)**, this had to be done within a sensible context. A variety of suitable synonyms for 'vexed' were given, including 'worried', 'frustrated', 'annoyed' and 'angered', but 'confused' or 'puzzled' were too far from the meaning of the original word, as was the idea that they 'disliked' Sylvia's attitude. Substituting 'dreaminess' appeared more difficult. Correct answers included 'she never focused', 'she lacked attention' or 'she was in her own world', and although 'she was caught up in her own imagination' was creditworthy, 'she was imaginative' did not capture the idea of inattentiveness. While the best answers focused on the two key words in the given quote, some candidates appeared to have misinterpreted the question and offered speculation about how the teachers viewed Sylvia's career choice.

Question 6(b) was an inferential question and several candidates correctly identified that Sylvia's mother wanted her to avoid a career in drama or an acting career. To 'go to drama school', however, could not be deemed as a valid career, and this was a common incorrect response. The question required understanding of the paragraph's final sentence; in some cases, candidates sought the answer earlier in the paragraph, selecting the word 'librarian', without apparent careful reading of the context. The word 'avoid' in the question was missed by some candidates who offered the lift 'A job with a proper future'.

Question 7

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked to identify one word used earlier in the fifth paragraph which conveyed the same idea as 'talent', the answer being 'flair'. Many candidates recognised the link between the two words and provided a correct answer. Some were distracted by the word 'passion' which has a different meaning. 'Master' and 'interest' were also occasionally selected; not only were these incorrect, but they also came from the end of the paragraph. The question asked for a single word; therefore, 'unexpected flair' could not be credited.

Question 7(b) was an inferential question which asked what Sylvia's father's 'unmet desire' was. A correct answer could focus on the father's relationship with his daughter, including a desire 'to establish a bond with her' or 'a way of showing his love for her'. Few candidates gave this response with a very small minority correctly stating that 'he wanted to share time with his daughter'. Another way in which this could be answered was by focusing on 'chess'. To write that 'he wanted to play chess with his daughter' simply repeated the question. Correct responses identified an ulterior motive: 'he wanted to pass on his interest in chess to his daughter'; 'her father wanted Sylvia to become good at chess' or 'he wanted her to share his passion'.

Not all candidates realised that the focus of the question was the father's wish or 'desire' so answers which ignored this by making Sylvia the focus, such as 'Sylvia did her best to master the game' or 'she showed loyalty to her father', were not creditworthy.

Question 8

Question 8 was the multiple-choice synonym question where understanding of five words from the text was tested. Candidates had to decide which of four alternatives had the same meaning as a word from the passage. Here, candidates are advised to decide on the closest synonym by taking each of the four possible choices back to the context and comparing them wisely. Such checking with the context is all-important with this type of question as some of the possible choices were not necessarily appropriate when compared to an alternative.

The most successful attempts were with **Question 8(c)** where 'with agreement' was correctly chosen as the synonym for 'approvingly', and with **Question 8(d)** where 'managed' was recognised as the best synonym for 'contrived'. Although several candidates correctly identified 'peeling' as a synonym for 'flaking' for

Question 8(a), an equal number chose 'fading' which was incorrect. **Question 8(e)** was less successfully dealt with, 'old' being a frequent choice by candidates, but considering the actual meaning of the word and the context, the correct answer was 'simple'. The word which the majority seemed least familiar with was 'inadequacies' for **Question 8(b)**; in the context, 'failings' was the correct answer since it reinforces that the cottage failed to meet the expected standard and thus was lacking a bookshelf, for example, and inadequate, but 'problems' was the most common incorrect response.

Question 9

Question 9 was the section dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft. In both **Question 9(a)** and **Question 9(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. Too often candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa.

Question 9(a) directed candidates to the phrase 'she stuck it out' and the first task was to give the meaning of this phrase. Answers such as she 'endured', 'tolerated', 'put up with', 'stayed with', 'remained in', 'kept at it' all correctly captured the idea of continuing with a difficult situation, in this case her job as an assistant librarian. While some candidates successfully provided an appropriate meaning, there was some misunderstanding of the task among responses which repeated the words in the phrase: 'she stuck with it', or those in which narrative detail was provided as an answer: 'she worked as an assistant librarian' or 'she applied for another job'. Other incorrect answers were too vague to score: 'she did the job' or 'she worked there for a year'. Some suggestions that she was 'trapped in' or 'forced to do' the job were also untrue, so incorrect.

In responding to the second task, which was to explain the effect, candidates needed to go beyond the literal and state what the phrase suggested about Sylvia's situation, her feelings or the job itself. Many candidates correctly recognised that the phrase suggested that Sylvia 'disliked' or 'wanted to leave' the job. Others correctly inferred that she was 'unhappy', 'unfulfilled' or that she showed 'perseverance' or 'resilience'. It was also correct to comment on the nature of the job as 'unfulfilling', 'disappointing' or 'frustrating', but there was not enough evidence to infer that the job was 'boring' or 'difficult'. Responses which gave the literal effect and consequence of her time working as an assistant librarian in the form of narrative detail – she 'applied for the post as a children's librarian' or 'she took a job in another town' – demonstrated a misunderstanding of the requirements of the question.

For **Question 9(b)**, candidates were directed to the phrase 'the landlord *hastily* told Sylvia' with the focus on the adverb 'hastily'. For meaning, some candidates correctly selected 'rapidly', 'hurriedly', 'quickly', 'without hesitation', but 'briefly', 'unexpectedly' or 'suddenly' failed to capture the idea of speed in this context. A few candidates provided 'hesitantly' as an incorrect answer. As with **Question 9(a)**, some responses focused on narrative background instead of the given quotation; answers such as 'he was advising Sylvia about the garden' were not creditworthy.

For the effect, candidates needed to consider what the word 'hastily' suggested about the landlord's thoughts, feelings and intentions. Responses which recognised that he was 'desperate' and 'eager' for Sylvia to rent the cottage, and that he was 'wanting to avoid the problem' of the overgrown garden or was 'distracting her' from the issue, were correct. It was also correct to infer that 'he was worried that Sylvia would change her mind' or 'be put off' from renting. However, responses such as 'he wanted her to rent' or 'he was persuading her' were too weak to be credited. It was also incorrect to write that he was 'rude', 'lazy', 'greedy' or 'arrogant' since these judgements could not be supported by the word 'hastily'. Some responses showed misunderstanding of the landlord's intentions, stating that he was 'reassuring' or 'convincing her' that he would solve the problem, or re-cast the text with 'he was confident the garden would be fine with a little work'.