

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11

Writing

Key Messages

- It is essential to read the question carefully and be clear about its particular focus.
- In **Section 1** tasks it is important to read the question very carefully to ensure all required details are included.
- Consider all the titles in Section 2 before choosing a topic to write on.
- Pay attention to commonly confused words such as this/these, they/there sit/seat.
- Greater focus on the accurate punctuation and layout of speech would improve performance.
- Focusing on correct tenses and subject / verb agreement would improve candidates' writing in both sections.

General Comments

The overall standard of the vast majority of responses this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. **Section 1** was answered well by most candidates but some underestimated the demands of the question, or did not read the task carefully enough. There was a spread of responses in **Section 2**, although the narrative questions were generally more popular than the others and this is a sensible approach for many candidates who are clearly comfortable writing narratives. The vast majority of candidates used the time well, wrote appropriate amounts for each question and avoided rubric infringements. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were similar to previous sessions: there was a great deal of very fluent, imaginative and accurate writing. Few prepared openings to essays were used and this worked to the benefit of candidates. There were very few instances of prepared essays, although occasionally a candidate found it challenging to include a specified sentence in a natural way. There were few examples of the inclusion of text messaging language, abbreviations and expressions such as 'gonna' and 'wanna', which can sometimes suggest the wrong register and are best avoided. There were a number of examples of unnecessarily offensive language, or content designed to shock, in Section 2. Candidates are reminded that this is never appropriate, even in direct speech.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1

The Directed Writing task is assessed with equal marks given to **Task Fulfilment** and **Language** criteria. Candidates had to write an article for their school magazine about the recent success of a school team in an important competition. The candidates were expected to write as a member of the successful team. In particular they were asked to identify the team and the competition, explain why they had been so successful this year, and how both the school and team had benefited from the win. This was a scenario that was clearly within the experience of many candidates, the majority of whom responded extremely well to this task. The scenario allowed use of a range of real and imaginary information and this contributed greatly to the success and interest of the responses.

Section 1 is Directed Writing and so involves more reading than **Section 2**. In this task candidates had to be aware that they were focusing on writing an effective article for the specified audience, which included both the staff and students of the school, in addition to parents and possibly siblings of the students. In order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points this year, responses needed to include:

- some details about the team **and** the competition it won
- why the team was so successful this year
- how team members **and** the whole school had benefited from this success.

In the first bullet point it was essential to include two details – the type of team and the competition won. The second bullet point required a reasonably developed response, highlighting a number of reasons for the team's improvement and success, and Bullet 3 required a full explanation of benefits their success had brought to the school and team members.

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

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

As far as **Task Fulfilment** was concerned this year, the best responses were those which kept their focus on the context and purpose of the article and shaped their writing according to the descriptors. In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas that will gain most marks. For the first bullet point the majority of candidates explained the team details through the sport or activity chosen – the senior football team, or the school quiz team, for example. However, some responses did not provide a clear explanation of the team, offering a vague suggestion such as 'our school team' without clearly identifying the activity or sport involved. A significant number of candidates did not name a competition, some simply referring to a match instead. Some candidates wrote about a team that had enjoyed repeated success over the years, which was a slight misreading of the task. Many candidates developed the first bullet point effectively by not only naming the team and competition, but also including other details such as the composition of the team and their own role within it, as well as additional details about the competition entered, such as the venue, or the teams they would be competing with. The second bullet point invited a wide variety of responses: the most successful responses offered a variety of ideas about what had contributed to the success of the team. Many focused on improved coaching or training, a renewed attitude or positivity, or improved facilities in the school. Several developed ideas about practice schedules, new diets, determined new coaches, or effective whole-school support contributing to the team's improvement and ability to win. All of these were clearly linked to the focus of the question. The best responses covered a number of these ideas, developing the detail with conviction and authenticity. A few responses offered very little development in this area, sometimes limiting their response to this bullet point to a single reason for the team's improvement.

When addressing the third bullet point some imaginative suggestions were made as to how the school and team members had benefited from the team's success - the more developed responses drew on their knowledge about sports scholarships, improved school facilities, new kits and practice equipment, or cash prizes and medals. Many also focused on the prestige of winning an important competition and its impact on the school's reputation, leading to more new student enrolments and national recognition for their school. Occasionally candidates did not address this bullet point fully, only looking at the benefits for the school, or the team members, but not both. Sometimes the benefits were rather implausible, for example, full scholarships to Cambridge University for the whole team, or cash awards amounting to millions of dollars for the school. Occasionally the benefits were rather undeveloped, for example, enjoying being the best team.

Therefore, the stronger candidates usually were able to amplify all three bullet points well and the best responses were those which included additional material while using the clues in the task. The most successful responses linked the first and second bullets skilfully, offering details about the team linked firmly to their previous disappointments and explaining their success by referring to changes in the team structure, coaching methods or practice schedule. Other responses needed to incorporate more detail in the bullet points. The bullet points do not always have to get equal treatment but it is also true that the answer should not be too unbalanced because otherwise a bullet point might not be adequately developed.

Generally, there was a good awareness of audience and candidates were comfortable with the concept of writing an article for their school magazine. However, some candidates missed the opportunity to embrace the diversity of the audience by focusing too closely on the performance of the team throughout the competition. These articles sometimes became rather detailed match reports instead of widening the article into something that would interest a range of readers. The register was kept suitably formal in most responses, with most candidates acknowledging a variety of people's contributions to the team's success and offering thanks and gratitude to both the senior staff of the school and the parents who had supported the team. The vast majority of candidates employed an appropriate format following the guidance given in the rubric by adopting a celebratory tone. The best responses were able to balance the need to explain the team's improved performance, while focusing on the many benefits this could bring the school community. Less successful answers became rather insular, often focusing on their own performance in the competition

rather than acknowledging the whole team and the rest of the school. The majority of responses adopted an appropriate format for an article, using a suitable headline. Some responses included in appropriate openings or endings for an article, writing as though it was a letter to a magazine. Organisation varied, with some candidates following the bullet points chronologically and others grouping their ideas as effectively in another order. Candidates are advised that they need to organise their writing in appropriate paragraphs in order to improve performance.

Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the formal but celebratory tone very well. A few responses were rather short, only just reaching the lower word limit. Candidates need to ensure that they address the word length requirements in their responses. Linguistically, candidates were at ease with vocabulary associated with school teams and writing about a competition: most found little difficulty in addressing the task to produce a convincing piece of work.

Section 2

Question 2

Describe a television show that you like very much and one you dislike. Explain why you like or dislike the shows. (Remember to describe the people and the type of show, not just what happens in one episode.)

This was a reasonably popular title. The vast majority of candidates who chose it were able to clearly identify two television programmes to discuss in their response – one they enjoyed and one they disliked. Most of the responses developed interesting ideas about the programmes chosen without becoming too descriptive about their content. The most successful responses chose programmes that they felt had a very positive influence on the audience in terms of personal development or programmes that were clearly designed to raise awareness. They then chose a less popular programme that had less purpose or that they cited as immoral or irresponsible. Some responses focused more heavily on their favourite programme, offering several reasons for their enjoyment of it, but found less to say about the programme they disliked. Occasionally the second programme chosen was a child's television show that they had simply grown out of and viewed as silly and childish. The less successful responses to this title simply described the content of the programmes chosen with one or two sentences about why they enjoyed or disliked it bolted on to the end of the description.

Question 3

Would you like to be a student in a school that is larger or smaller than the one you now attend? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was a reasonably popular title. It was often approached by candidates who clearly had strong feelings on the subject. Many expressed either satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their present school due to its size, referring in detail to differences in class sizes, the number of teachers, facilities and extra-curricular opportunities in large and small schools. Some candidates were emphatic in their belief that only a large school could offer the appropriate opportunities and facilities to lead to success in the world, while others supported smaller schools for their personal attention, smaller classes and friendlier atmospheres. Many personal experiences were successfully utilised by candidates and it was clearly a title for those who had strong opinions, as they could sustain their arguments with convincing evidence over a number of paragraphs rather than merely repeating a strong but limited view.

Question 4

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'It was clear the photograph proved that I was right.'

This was a very popular title. Favourite themes included criminals being caught through an incriminating photograph, being wrongly accused until a photograph offered proof of innocence, or a family secret that came to light due to a photograph being discovered. The best essays were those that built up to the specified sentence effectively and then explored the aftermath fully. There were some really moving accounts of being accused wrongly and treated with contempt until the discovery of CCTV footage that could save the day. Other successful responses explored family scenarios where a secret sibling was discovered or an adoption suspected, building up suspense successfully through exploration of feelings. Less successful responses spent a great deal of time building up to the required sentence in their narrative, but did not really

explore the potential in terms of consequences. These responses often ended with the specified sentence. The weakest responses were those which told a story which lacked any development of tension or drama. It was noticeable at all levels of response how well the majority of candidates integrated the given sentence into their writing without any sense of awkwardness.

Question 5

Homework

This was a reasonably popular topic inviting a wide range of responses. Any approach to this question was possible. The best responses treated it as a reflective title exploring the importance of homework for ensuring academic success, while considering the intrusion on students' personal and leisure time. Many responses cited the tension and misery caused by excessive homework, while acknowledging its usefulness in ensuring that topics have been understood before examinations. Less successful responses struggled to develop ideas on the topic and became rather repetitive, often omitting to look at both positives and negatives. Occasionally responses became a rant against teachers who set too much homework and ruin their students' social lives. This was obviously a self-limiting approach and these responses did not develop ideas fully or became very repetitive as the candidate struggled to meet the required length of response.

Question 6

Write about a time when a close friend tried to help you and only made things worse.

This was a very popular title, inviting some really powerful stories of good intentions going badly wrong. Stories usually involved a situation in which a friend or family member tried to intervene and made a bad situation worse. The better responses were measured and thoughtful in their approach, sometimes exploring a complex situation where the intervention became necessary despite its risks. Such situations were treated in a number of ways with some showing a good lexical range to highlight the drama and tension. Often the protagonist's response to the intervention formed the most interesting part of the narrative, whether forgiving or outraged. Many responses were very reflective, exploring how good intentions have to be appreciated whether the outcome is positive or negative. A large number of responses featured a strong sense of self-reflection, incorporating a strong moral message. Less successful responses focused on trivial situations, or became rather melodramatic and unconvincing.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Writing

Key Messages

- In **Section 1** candidates are advised to become familiar with all the criteria for good Task Fulfilment and use it as a checklist. Even candidates getting a low band mark for Language can still gain a good band mark for Task Fulfilment.
- Attention should be given to the full requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**, especially where there is a word in bold type.
- In **Section 1** thought should be given to the proper format and an attempt made to avoid mixed formats.
- Candidates must be clear about the purpose, audience and situation in **Section 1** so as not to contradict what is given in the task.
- It is not necessary to write out the full wording of a question at the start of an essay and candidates are advised not to do this.
- Ensuring correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority candidates.
- The random use of link words and sentence openings such as 'Moreover' and 'Furthermore' should be avoided. These must be thought out far more correctly.
- Increasingly, the use of capital letters is overlooked whereas it must be seen as essential. This was particularly true this year in the headlines in **Section 1**.
- Constructions such as 'me and my friends....' should be avoided as they give a very awkward feel to the writing.

General Comments

- The overall standard of the vast majority this year seemed to be on a par with that of previous years. There were fewer examples of Band 1 Language being displayed in **Section 2**, but this was made up for with an increase in **Section 1**. The very best candidates in this exam demonstrate an ability which belies the fact that most are writing in a second language. Equally, fewer and fewer candidates fall into Bands 7 and 8. Candidates are now much better at avoiding slang and text messaging in essays, although there is still some evidence of this. **Section 1** was done well by the vast majority although there were many examples of mixed format. This year, in **Section 2**, all of the titles were done but **Question 4** proved more popular than is usual for any one title. Time management for the vast majority was very good. The strengths and weaknesses of the linguistic ability were very much those which have featured in previous reports. There was improved paragraphing in the **Section 1** task this year. Sentence separation errors still give cause for concern.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine that they and other members of their class had been invited to attend a festival. The Principal of the school is pleased that students took part and the Principal wants the candidate to write an article for the school magazine about what happened at the festival. Candidates had a wide choice of festivals to choose from and the overwhelming majority of them responded extremely well to this **purpose** and **situation**. **Section 1** is directed writing and so has more of a reading element than **Section 2**. Candidates must accept the need to follow instructions and this year had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer had to have:

- details of a festival **and** where it was held
- what the candidate and other students did at the festival
- an explanation of how both the students **and** the school would benefit.

In **Task Fulfilment** it is the development of the ideas, or responses to the bullet points, that will gain most marks. Very often the TF mark will be vital in helping candidates who are weak linguistically. The bullet points do not have to be dealt with at equal length but also no one paragraph should be so detailed that it prevents another point being dealt with adequately. There is a big difference between merely addressing the bullet point and elaborating it. This year, for **bullet point 1**, a simple addressing of the point gave the title or name of the festival and the name of a location, usually a town or building. Such thin details were enough to locate the event but candidates should always be prepared to elaborate within the 200-300 word limit. More successful candidates were prepared to name the festival and add some relevant detail such as its purpose and/or its appeal to the people who attended. In making the location clear, it was true that the school magazine readers would surely know the location once named (especially when it was their own school), but candidates must accept that in a directed writing exam they should aim to impress with more than the minimum. Therefore 'a village hall' is too vague to convince the reader. 'The village hall in Curepipe' makes it less vague but the best candidates went further and gave details as to why a given venue was appropriate, traditional or even symbolic. The most popular festivals were religious ones; Divali, and Holi were mentioned many times, amongst others. There were many entertainment festivals and many festivals of sport, as well as science fairs, food fairs and music days. There were even some less well known festivals such as the 'Ice and Wood Carving Festival'. Some candidates needed to give a little more thought to what was a festival. For example it was quite difficult to see a single sporting game (many weaker candidates confused 'festival' with 'competition') or a single debate competition or an Open Day at a School as a festival exactly but benefit of doubt was given to these – they were clearly seen as public events and sometimes seemed festive. It was much more difficult though to give adequate credit to the candidate who mentioned a hiking trip, a camping trip or a blood transfusion session as a 'festival' even though the other bullet points could still be addressed.

Bullet point 2 asked for details of student involvement in the festival. This tended to separate into two elements. One form of participation was a rather passive one where the students were at the festival mainly as spectators or observers. So they might be in the audience at a musical event or might be at the roadside when religious pilgrims processed towards some destination. This approach led to some finely observed details such as the enthusiasm of the participants and the use of colours in religious events but the passive approach was a little limited. The question asked for what the students did and so those who detailed active participation scored more highly and there was almost no limit to the ways in which people participated. They worshipped at religious festivals, played the music and performed dramas in entertainments, cooked and sold food as well as acting as hosts and presenters at the event. The majority of candidates found this bullet point an accessible one and impressed with details of sights, sounds and smells - it was very obvious that most were speaking from experience of events they were very familiar with. Some weaker candidates relied on a strictly narrative approach, stringing together a sequence of events in a 'then we did this...' way and missed the chance to include the atmosphere of the event. A very small number of candidates missed even this opportunity by assuming that the event spoke for itself and did not need much describing. Some also, those who confused festival with 'match', merely gave routine summaries of a sporting tie.

Bullet point 3 needed to be very carefully thought out. A noticeable number of candidates made the mistake of assuming the benefits would be obvious and did not spell out what they were. They assumed that success in a sporting festival, for example, was an obvious benefit to all because they confused the word 'benefit' with 'reward' and as soon as they won a prize in bullet 2 that was it. It must be stressed again that in a directed writing task candidates must respond fully to each bullet point, whilst carefully trying not to repeat information. Certainly, the better candidates started with the idea of having won something but soon moved on to other tangible benefits for the students. These could include all the students together. For example, their benefit was the recognition they received as champions or helpers. Some were given a financial reward, some were given medals. Most of the more successful writers backed up the material reward with a less material benefit such as an awareness of teamwork or an enhanced realisation of their own talent. It is true that many of the benefits were lavish and way beyond expectations, such as scholarships to universities, but this was fine and in keeping with the task set. The very best candidates here made a distinction between the writer and the other students, such as the candidate who wrote that they all felt empowered by the outcome of the event but that the writer had been singled out for some special benefit, such as an improved role within school. What really became the discriminator this year was that bullet 3 had two parts and this proved once again how important it is to read carefully every bit of the question. Many, many candidates stopped at the benefit to the students and forgot to mention the benefit to the school, even though the word 'and' was in bold. In this way they put a self-imposed limit on the mark they could gain. Some candidates got around this by making clear the benefit was a mutually shared one between the students and the school – but they had to make this clear and not just assume that by mentioning one it involved the other. Some said that the

students and the school 'shared' the recognition, for example in the raising of the profiles of both the team and the school. Slightly better were the candidates who had clearly different benefits for the students and the school, for example medals and self-esteem for the students and a raised profile and money for school repairs, as well as the prospect of more students joining the School.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and candidates were admirably clear about what they were doing in this text. The purpose was to entertain the readers in a lively way with what had happened and inform them of what had taken place and the majority had no difficulty in conveying this. Unfortunately, a small number of candidates misread the scenario and set the festival in the future rather than in the past so that everything was in preparation rather than as a reporting back. This made it extremely difficult to answer bullet 3 because they could only guess at what the benefits might be. Similarly, the **situation** was very well understood by the majority but many made the mistake of thinking that they were actually organising the festival rather than merely participating in it. There was also a small number of candidates who did not see that they had been asked to write the article by the Principal and they wrote as if it would be a pleasant surprise for the Principal to hear about this. This approach often went hand in hand with being uncertain here about the proper **audience** for this task. Although the Principal had asked for the article to be written, it appeared in a school magazine, not a report to the Principal. That meant that the article was for a mixed audience, but mainly a student audience. **The register** was very well maintained and kept properly formal by most but there was also the opportunity here for some teenage phrases in keeping with the majority audience (a number of candidates told how the festival 'rocked'). The vocabulary of religious services or sporting or musical terminology was a helpful addition when well used.

It is important to stress at this point that, although a number of weaknesses have been identified so far in purpose, situation, tone/register, these were relatively few in number and the task as a whole was well done by most candidates. The correct **format** for a school magazine article provided very many students with an excellent opportunity to display their understanding of such a text. A headline was an essential requirement as it was asked for in the question and most provided one. They enhanced the text by adding the name of a reporter and very often with a small empty box suggesting a picture and a caption to go with it. This was excellent at creating the flavour of such a text. Some candidates appeared to be unsure about the format for such a text and so fell back on providing a letter format as they were presumably more used to this. This was often made even less helpful by candidates who addressed the text to the Principal and provided addresses and a specific date, as well as a valediction and signature. Some produced a half-way house where they wrote a letter to a magazine editor and this letter contained their article. This approach was at least understood and some benefit of the doubt was given.

Organisation hardly varied, with candidates logically and sensibly following the bullet points in the order given. Some details about the festival in general were included in bullet 2 and enhanced what had been said in bullet 1. Overall, the vast majority wrote a suitable amount for **Section 1** and captured the polite, formal **tone** and approach very well. If anything, the majority of candidates would have benefited from just one or two more touches to enhance the magazine style (for example, a rhetorical question or a short quotation to help distinguish this type of text from any other) but in truth this is a high level skill and was managed by a few of the very able candidates. **Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when bullet 3 was answered fully. There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and no examples of a nil response.

Linguistically, with subject matter close to their personal experience, most candidates found it quite straightforward to produce a convincing piece of work. For the same reason, spelling was generally satisfactory. Paragraphing was also done very well indeed this year. On the other hand, candidates seem now to struggle to see capital letters as important (as for the titles of festivals) and it was noticeable how many capital letters were missing in the headlines. Candidates need to think about how this affects the proper format or style of a text. Possibly the weakness which needed to be thought about most is that many candidates did not maintain the correct tense when looking back at the event and far too often used constructions starting 'we had...' as in 'we had won...' or 'we had sold...' when simply 'we won' or 'we sold' was correct.

The word 'Principal' was sometimes written as 'Principle', which was unexpected as the word was in the question.

Section 2 Creative Writing

- 2. Describe the scene and the atmosphere during a busy time close to the sea or near a river. (Remember that you are describing the atmosphere, the surroundings and the people, not just naming who is present.)**

This was not a very popular question but it was attempted successfully by a small number of candidates, some of whom obviously lived in such a working location or some who used it to write an essay about a family trip to the seaside. The latter often included too much narrative (with a list of people and events) and the description of the seaside location was very often omitted in favour of the activities of those enjoying a day out. Those who took the former approach and described a working location near the water saw the work as either complementing the surroundings or at odds with it, although it was true that more candidates needed to put an emphasis on the word 'busy' in the question. Whichever approach was taken, candidates were generally successful in evoking the atmosphere. Most also were successful in stressing times of the day when the beauty or otherwise was most obvious. The use of adjectives was obviously important and those candidates who could handle effective similes did well. The senses play an important part in a full description and the best candidates were able to employ all five with this scenario. As far as language is concerned, it is worth repeating last year's advice that candidates need to realise that this kind of essay is most effective in the present tense, unless contrasting past and present events, although those who wrote about a trip to the seaside based on actual fact did well enough in the past tense.

- 3. What are the important things to think about when choosing a career? Give reasons and examples to support your view.**

This was quite a popular question and candidates were clearly at that age when such considerations were beginning to be important to them. There was a remarkable sense of agreement between candidates of all linguistic ability as to what is important when choosing a career. Most mentioned the need to enjoy the career and the work involved in it. Most mentioned salary and the need to provide for a family in the future. Many cited the influence of parents but all were adamant that a parent's view could only help with advice in the choosing of a career; it could not influence it unduly. Workplace conditions in the physical sense were seen as important as were working relationships with colleagues. Many candidates liked the idea of working overseas but even so most were clear that it was necessary to work wherever the opportunity arose. One conclusion was clear to everyone and that was that happiness at work and job satisfaction were of the greatest importance. As with such essays in previous years, there was a tendency for the essay to sound a little list-like but this was handled better than in previous years with many illustrations of each point made to give weight to the points being listed. Paragraphs dedicated to separate considerations were well used by most. It was also true that pronouns needed more attention as 'we' and 'one' and 'you' and 'they' were often interchanged in an awkward way.

- 4. Write a story which includes the words: 'What are you searching for in this room? You have no right to be here.'**

This title was far and away the most popular one this year and it produced a number of very good narratives. It is pleasing to report that for the second year in a row the given sentence was generally well integrated into the narrative. There were of course all sorts of stories but one or two were very popular. Sneaking into the Principal's room or school office to get an exam paper or to change grades was a popular storyline, as was breaking in to get a business rival's secrets. Candidates often wrote about a birthday party or wedding reception where the family was gathered downstairs. Suddenly, the narrator would remember something that had been left upstairs in a bedroom and have to go and retrieve it, only to find someone in the room, apparently stealing. One variation on this was the friend or relative looking for papers to prove something. More mundane were the essays in which the narrator and some friends hit a ball into a neighbour's house and had to retrieve it, only to be caught at the crucial moment. Events often took a sinister turn when a crime had been committed and the narrator, with or without help, was rummaging in the suspect's room for evidence. Haunted houses are always popular in the narratives and here was no exception with narrators having to spend time reluctantly in such a house and being caught by some sinister creature. The narratives seemed better paced and more carefully structured than in most years with the given sentence falling into place more readily and not so much as an afterthought. Narratives benefit greatly from the use of speech and here was a case in point. It was not only the given sentence, but dialogue between two people secretly in a room or plotting which could create suspense if sparingly used. However, candidates still struggle with the setting out of speech and unless two speakers are separated onto different lines, it can lead to real confusion.

5. Peace.

This was not a popular title, compared to **Questions 4** and **3**. In recent years the single word title has become more popular than it used to be as candidates have realised that a narrative approach can be adopted. There were stories therefore about how peace was brought to a family in dispute when an issue was resolved (which could equally have been **Question 6**). There were several war narratives, both realistic and fantasy-based in the style of the television series 'Game of Thrones'. These worked very well. Less successful were the more philosophical essays about peace as a concept in which ideas were repeated. Some candidates wrote about peaceful times of the day and places that they knew, as well as world peace. Some wrote about peace as a state of mind, brought about by contentment and they detailed what this contentment meant to them and what brought it about.

6. Write a story about someone who settled a disagreement.

This was not very popular either. It is difficult to understand why, as there was nothing more difficult about this than **Question 4**, apart from the fact that most candidates who wanted to do a narrative were satisfied by the time they read to **Question 4**. The responses were characterised by some rather petty disagreements, some domestic disagreements and some sibling rivalry.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/21

Reading

Key Messages

Candidates should read all question wording thoroughly to ensure crucial instructions are not missed, as in **Question 4**, where two boxes were to be ticked but several candidates ticked only one, thus denying themselves a possible mark.

Candidates are advised (i) to read both passages in the insert before any questions are attempted; (ii) to read every question in advance. It should also be noted that each question focuses on a different aspect of the text, so candidates are advised not to give the same answer to more than one question.

In **Question 1(a)**, while candidates are becoming adept at selecting the required information, they should be aware that content points will not score if they are spread across two bullets with no obvious link; if they do so, neither will gain the mark because neither is complete in itself.

In **Question 1(b)** work is needed on the meaning and accurate use of linking words such as 'nevertheless', 'however', 'moreover' and 'thus', together with the avoidance of the repetitive use of simple connectives such as 'and' and 'but'.

Candidates would benefit from frequent reading of a variety of texts, particularly to prepare them for the demands of the second section of the Paper. The variety of questions - testing inference, vocabulary and the writer's craft, as well as more literal comprehension - requires the confidence in analysing and understanding which will develop with such regular reading.

General Comments

Candidates generally offered neatly presented scripts and answers were given within the guiding parameters of the answer booklet. The majority avoided unnecessary crossing out which, while acceptable if done carefully, can lead to illegibility if practised too casually. The majority attempted all questions and there appeared to be no issue with lack of time. Candidates had been prepared well, particularly for **Section 1** of the Paper; **Section 2** was less well attempted.

The first, non-fiction, passage entitled 'Railways' was a familiar subject for candidates but it included other information, possibly new to them, which caught their attention. Questions were set to test the candidates' ability to read and show understanding of the ideas presented. 20 marks were available for the summary question, with 15 of these being awarded for selection of content points from the text and 5 marks for the assessment of the ability to express these points fluently, in their own words as far as possible. Further questions tested this ability to read for ideas: to respond to the text by drawing on personal knowledge and experience; to recognise an opinion of the writer, distinguishing it from the surrounding facts; and to decide, from close reading, whether each of two given statements was true or false.

The second passage, from an account by an animal photographer which told the story of how he once tried to film a shy animal – the chevrotain – seemed to be less accessible. Such a narrative passage requires not only careful reading but also thoughtful consideration by candidates to show their understanding of the writer's meaning. Questions tested their ability to answer literal comprehension questions, inferential questions, the understanding of vocabulary, use of their own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here.

The variety of subject matter provided the opportunity for questions which stretched and discriminated amongst candidates, allowing the best responses to demonstrate an ability to deal with the unfamiliar as well as the familiar. This was reflected in a wide range of scores.

In **Question 1(a)** the majority of candidates followed the bullet point style of the first (given) point, producing a list of selected ideas separated into the two boxes, as instructed. Keeping in mind the particular information required for each box is essential to avoid the confusion of points across the two and this sort of muddling occurred less frequently than in the previous series. Many candidates scored less well in recording the information required for the first box, where there was a need to include both developments in the railway industry and the benefits of such developments, than the second box, which required only the advantages of modern day train travel.

A single, clear point per bullet should be aimed for, to avoid confusion, with no point relying on a previous one unless an appropriate contextual link is made. Those who chose to copy directly from the passage, but tried to abbreviate the information, sometimes omitted a key aspect of one or more points or distorted the sense, as in: 'The invention of moveable points in the track meant that travelling long distances was not possible.'

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, accurate, continuous prose; it should be recognised that the instruction to 'use own words' is modified by the phrase which follows: 'as far as possible'. If the passage uses terms which are specific to the subject (here, for example, in the context of 'Railways', words and phrases such as 'points', 'international standard gauge' and 'mainline railways' and even 'diesel trains'), it is quite acceptable to repeat these terms rather than try to find synonyms.

There were several admirable results among those who made a clear attempt to use their own words and original structures, a few candidates writing with confidence and style to gain full marks. Others needed to include greater originality of expression and structure in order to gain high marks. Frequently, attempts were a reworking of the relevant details from the passage, with the substitution of original words here and there. Lifting and repositioning randomly selected patches of text resulted in the weakest candidates being unable to link them and the results made only limited sense.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section 1

Reading for Ideas

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the points in the passage which described the stages in the development of railways and the benefits these developments brought, and the advantages of train travel nowadays. The information was to be taken from the whole passage and they could produce these points using either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding those given (which were unnecessarily repeated by some candidates), there were a further 18 points of which candidates could identify any combination, to a maximum of 15. Full marks were seen in a small number of scripts; the weakest responses were those who consistently offered only developments in the railways, stopping short of explaining what the particular benefit of each of these was. This was sometimes the case even with the better candidates. Marks which were lost were almost invariably the result of beginning but not completing an idea, e.g. referring to iron being placed on wooden rails without explaining how the benefit of this was a longer lifespan, or saying that the electric train was an improvement on steam and diesel engines without mention of their cheaper running costs and lower pollution levels.

Points were usually listed either in note form or short sentences, under bullet marks, as suggested by the examples provided. Very few copied large sections of the text in continuous prose, a strategy which sometimes scored some early points but lack of space and inclusion of irrelevance often denied the later ones. While the use of such bulleted points can be the most beneficial method of presenting the information, great care is needed to ensure that the point being made is not split across two bullets without a clear contextual link e.g.

- Invention of electric train
- Pollution is reduced

Here, there is no clear suggestion that reduced pollution was the result of the production of the electric train; without a specific subject to the second statement, the subject of the rubric (here, 'railways') is assumed,

grammatically. Thus, the point is not made. Had the second bullet, above, begun with a clear link the point would have scored at 'reduced', as in:

- Invention of electric train
- *This* meant pollution was reduced

Ideally, this would have read - under a single bullet - 'Invention of the electric train meant pollution was reduced.' Including *all* relevant information under one bullet mark avoids any risk of an incomplete point.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described the developments and subsequent benefits of railways, from their beginnings up to the present time, and there were 10 points which candidates could make in the first box. 4 of these were in Paragraph 1, which concentrated on the development of rail tracks in particular. The first of these was the progression from the use of limestone grooves, mentioned in the given point, to the creation of wooden tracks along which carriages could be pulled by men or animals. The majority of candidates had no difficulty in identifying this as their first point. Such trains then were used in mining for the transportation of coal. Many candidates did not differentiate between this general point and the specific example of how this was done in Britain, suggesting that the benefit of these wooden rails was to take coal only 'to canals'. Such an example only illustrates the main point which should have been given. Most recognised the next development as the placing of iron on top of wooden tracks but did not always explain the benefit of this i.e. to prolong the life of the track. Similarly, while the final development stated in Paragraph 1 was frequently given – the invention of moveable points, or mechanical devices in the track – their benefit, i.e. the possibility of a wider variety of journeys, was often ignored. Sometimes, the explanation of how these points worked (guiding the train from one track to another) was offered as the 'benefit'; however, this did not go far enough.

A further point was to be found in Paragraph 2 and, almost without exception, candidates picked up that the introduction of an international standard gauge was the important thing. At times, however, it was ignored in favour of giving the negative impact of the earlier existence of many different gauge sizes, which meant that long journeys were not possible without several changes of train. Although not directly stated, the benefit of the 'standard' gauge had to be understood: that it provided the opportunity for longer journeys, or fewer train changes on a journey; either way of expressing the benefit was acceptable.

Paragraph 3 focused on the various types of engine which took over from man or animal power; 5 points were provided. The first was identified by almost everyone: that rail transport 'blossomed' when steam trains were invented. However, a number of scripts lacked the explanation of why this 'blossoming' occurred and was regarded as a benefit: i.e. because these engines could pull several carriages. The next advantage was usually mentioned – that transportation of goods became cheaper – but often the development which resulted in this benefit was not stated. Candidates could have said that it was the result of either steam engines, which brought about the construction of mainline railways, or of the mainline railways themselves. Some who continued the point by lifting from the passage omitted the word *than*, thereby stating that *...transportation of goods became cheaper ^ by other methods*; this was quite the opposite of the intended meaning and could not score. The cheap, or cheaper, running and maintenance costs of the diesel, compared with the steam engine, was a frequently mentioned benefit. The mark was only lost when the benefit was couched in terms of their 'lower cost'; this implied that they were cheaper to buy, instead of cheaper to run and maintain. Similarly, electric trains also had cheap, or cheaper, running costs and that had to be precisely stated as their first benefit. The final benefit to be considered was that electric trains mean less noise or less pollution than other engines. Either of these advantages was acceptable.

The second section of the rubric asked for the advantages of train travel nowadays. The first word of Paragraph 4, 'Nowadays', clearly indicated that here was the place to begin looking for these advantages. Apart from the given point about train stations being more conveniently situated than airports (a fact which was often repeated, unnecessarily), the candidate could make 8 more points, the first 3 being in paragraph 4. Invariably, the initial advantage was offered: that there are no security checks at train stations. The second was made well, by most candidates, who deduced that if a *disadvantage* of air travel is the existence of a baggage allowance policy which is 'not the case with train travel', then an *advantage* of train travel must be that there is no such policy. The lift which compared the situation between airlines and trains could also make the point; 'baggage', 'luggage' or even 'what passengers can take/carry with them' were all acceptable terms. The next advantage again related to baggage: passengers can carry their luggage with them, meaning that they can keep an eye on it, that it will not be lost/stolen or that they will not have to wait a long time for it to be unloaded at the end of their journey. The point was not complete until the link between security of luggage and the fact that passengers could keep it with them was made.

Paragraph 5 outlined the final 5 advantages. The first was the incredibly fast speed of modern trains. ('fast' or 'quite fast' were not enough; the minimum speed needed to be 'very fast'.) The Japanese 'bullet' and the

Eurostar trains were given as examples in the text and, as such, were not rewarded in place of the main point about speed. Flexibility in seating arrangements on trains was often referred to but was not always explained in terms of an advantage; either the possibility of allowing families to sit together, or the relaxing or enjoyable journey which can be experienced with such flexibility needed to be added. The fact that people can move around in a train was the next advantage and was usually expressed as such, though it was possible to gain the mark with reference to going to a restaurant carriage to get a drink or a meal. The last two advantages related particularly to business people, but could be scored equally in terms of the general public, too. One was the possibility of travelling overnight and thus saving either time or the money required for hotel accommodation; the final one was the provision of electrical power points, advantageous because they allow electronic gadgets to be charged, turn trains into mobile offices or allow people to work as they travel.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words as far as possible, describing the stages in the development of railways and the benefits these developments brought, and the advantages of train travel nowadays. They were to write no more than 160 words (the first 10 of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet. Almost all candidates made some attempt at this summary, most completing it within the writing frame. Very short answers, which can never score highly because they inevitably display neither sustained use of own words nor extended ability to write in stylish or accurate English, were very rare.

As mentioned in 'General Comments', above, there were a few technical 'railway' terms which candidates would not be expected to replace. There was no necessity, for example, to substitute 'changing parts' for the original *moveable points*, or cause unnecessary clumsiness such as referring to a *diesel train* as 'a train that doesn't run on steam but is empowered by a fuel called diesel'. Notably, the word *invaluable* was frequently misunderstood as 'useless' or 'not worth anything'. This was understandable given that the prefix *in...* usually means 'not' (e.g. *indefinite*, *indecisive*). However, occasionally, as here, it emphasises a positive quality. The best responses, however, used original wording in a noticeable manner: 'of immense importance' used for *invaluable*; 'durability' and even 'longevity' replacing *lifespan*; 'environmentally friendly' substituting for *less noisy and create fewer pollutants*. Some of these responses were combined with accurate English which used a variety of structures, including complex sentences. It was, however, very much the minority who gained full marks for style. Many others restructured and edited appropriate areas of text, attempting some measure of originality in their use of English. Their efforts are to be applauded but would be improved with greater focus on accuracy and variety in sentence construction. Too often structures were limited to brief, simple sentences or 'and' / 'but' compound sentences. The weakest responses directly copied blocks of text and linking them led to difficulty in controlling sentence structure.

At all levels but the very best, there was a high number of grammatical and punctuation errors. Improvement could be made in terms of sentence separation which was insufficient in many scripts, the comma frequently substituting for the full stop e.g. 'Steam engines had maintenance problems, this led to their replacement...' and 'the greatest development is the electric train, they are beneficial to people'. Subject/verb agreement was also noticeably weak at times, e.g. 'train travel nowadays *tend* to be easy' and 'wooden rails which was used...'. There was misuse or omission of articles, e.g. 'mechanical devices permitted ^ variety of journeys' and 'Steam trains were then replaced by *the* diesel trains'. On occasion, auxiliary verbs were omitted, resulting in a note style, e.g. 'Diesel trains ^ introduced due to their low cost' and 'electrical power points ^ provided to charge mobile phones'.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 continued to test the ability to respond to the ideas presented in certain sections of the text. **Question 2** asked candidates to give, from their own knowledge or experience, two examples of 'stunning technological achievement'. A range of suggestions was offered, some from the candidates' knowledge of history, such as the construction of The Pyramids, or from recent times. The possibilities were endless but most selected technological examples with which they are familiar, such as television, mobile phones or computer technology and software of one sort or another. The very few who did not score on this question usually lost the marks because they ignored the rubric: *...do not refer to specific examples from the passage which are linked to transport*. Other approaches which were not rewarded were those which generalised widely, such as 'buildings', 'roads' or 'machines'; these needed to be more specifically *stunning* achievements and those who read the question properly offered particular examples such as the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, the construction of London Bridge or the invention of robot machines in the car industry.

Question 3 required candidates to select and write down **one** opinion from Paragraph 3. It was necessary to read all the paragraph to find, fairly near the end, the presumption that *Everyone loves the puffing sound of an old-style steam train*. This was identified correctly in many scripts. Some lifted the reference to many older people remembering them with nostalgia from the text, without highlighting the actual opinion in some way.

The mark could not be awarded because the opinion became lost in fact. Others incorrectly suggested facts which can be proven, from earlier in the paragraph, such as 'The diesel train was better than the steam train'.

Question 4 asked candidates to indicate, from their reading of Paragraph 5, whether each of two given statements was true or false. This question was answered correctly in the vast majority of scripts. As mentioned earlier, candidates occasionally stopped short in their reading of the question, taking in only the first line which read ... *whether each of the following statements is true or...* Consequently they ticked only the first 'true' box, leaving the second box (which was a 'false' statement) without a tick at all; an example of the importance of reading the question with care.

Section 2

Reading for Meaning

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

All parts of **Question 5** related to Paragraph 1 and great care was needed in selecting precisely which area of the text was required to answer each particular sub-**Question. 3** of the 4 parts were literal comprehension questions, the answers to which could be found directly in the text. Candidates are advised to re-read the paragraph before answering the questions related to it.

Question 5(a) focused on *why*, apart from the expense, animal photographers might not use the 'best method' of making an animal film. The quoted words are in the second line of the paragraph and the 'method' was then clearly explained in terms of the very long time it takes; reference to the expense (which the question suggests should not be part of the answer) followed. The writer then immediately summed up the difficulties which can deter people from using this method: *unless you have plenty of time and resources ... it is out of the question*. Candidates needed to turn the writer's words round in explanation, stating it either in terms of what one *has to have*, or *needs*, to use the best method, or what one might *not* have. Simply saying 'Time' and /or 'resources' alone was not sufficiently clear. Similarly, 'limited time', without the qualification of the photographer only having limited time, is ambiguous. The better candidates recognised that plenty of time and/or resources were essential and said, concisely, that the method 'takes a lot of time', 'required plenty of resources', or that 'they might not have enough time'. Many others spotted the word *difficulties*, further on in the paragraph and, having missed the clear reference to the 'best method', in line 2, went on to use material from lines 6-8 - information which was required for the next question.

Question 5(b) asked for two *difficulties* of trying to film animals in a tropical forest. The majority of responses successfully identified the first difficulty, usually lifting the fact that animals are 'rarely visible' there; extending the lift to include mention of photographers growing pale made no sense and forfeited the mark. Some lost the second mark with unclear expression. Lifting the words *only a momentary glimpse* was not enough to answer the question 'How is it difficult...?' Alone, those words do not make sense and needed the addition of something like 'They get only a momentary glimpse of animals / them.'

Question 5(c) was an **own words** question which asked for an explanation of why the writer thinks the best way to find an animal which is doing something worth filming is to catch it and establish it in 'temporary captivity'. Candidates found this a challenging question on the Paper. The key words here were *proximity* and *miracle*. Words such as 'close', 'nearby' and 'within range' or 'within filming distance' were the best synonyms offered for the first. Other acceptable responses were 'impossible', 'unbelievable' and the inventive 'it was never going to happen', 'out of this world' or 'once in a blue moon'. But there were few accurate responses. The weaker attempts at the second were usually 'hard', 'difficult' or 'rare'. Many candidates did not focus on the key words and offered, in a generalised way, the idea of getting the animal settled in an environment as similar to its usual habitat as possible so that it will behave naturally. Some simply repeated the words of the question: ... *the best way to find an animal 'which is doing something worth filming' ... following them with the other parts of the same sentence, ... is to catch your animal first and establish it in temporary captivity* and then to repeat *because to find an animal in proximity doing something worth filming would be almost a miracle*. This reworking of the text did not identify the key words nor use any original vocabulary.

Question 5(d) was another literal comprehension task which required careful reading of the wording. Candidates were asked to explain the two ways in which the undergrowth on a film set may cause problems. It was necessary to rework the writer's words in order to give an appropriate answer to the question. The text gave the problems in terms of how they might be resolved; candidates had to ensure that they offered their

answers clearly as the problems and not the solutions. Thus, the most succinct correct answers were, for example, that '(too many) holes allowed animals to hide' and that 'there might be patches of shade'. Other responses were longer but equally correct, e.g. 'If there are many gaps or places where a creature might hide' and 'If the undergrowth is too thick there may be awkward patches of shade'. The best responses saw that such expression accurately stated how the undergrowth caused the problems experienced. Quite often there was no manipulation of the writer's words and answers which lifted the solutions from the text were not rewarded, i.e. 'It must be free of too many holes where a bashful creature can hide and thin enough to avoid awkward patches of shade.' The question asked for problems, not solutions.

Question 6(a) asked candidates to select the characteristic of the chevrotain which made it an appealing subject for a photograph. Most opted for the word *photogenic*, but being photogenic does not in itself imply an 'appealing' characteristic. They were in the right area of the text but the relevant 'characteristic' of the animal - the one which made it 'photogenic' - was its cuteness, suggested immediately after the writer said what he and the team wanted to photograph: *a cute type of antelope*. Many responses identified the correct characteristic, some with the addition of the word 'photogenic', which was acceptable as a neutral addition; 'photogenic' alone was not the answer. The mark was also lost by those who went further into the paragraph to offer the chevrotain's swimming habits or its carnivorous nature. This information was required by the following question.

Question 6(b) asked for two further characteristics of the chevrotain; this time, those which made it *unusual*. As in **Questions 5(a)** and **5(b)**, candidates often used the same material twice in the two parts of **Question 6**. The 'unusual' characteristics were those frequently offered as the response to the previous question: it could swim underwater and was carnivorous. The ability to swim under water was less frequently seen than the fact that it ate, or had 'a passion for' snails and beetles (which was the alternative way of expressing 'carnivorous').

Question 7(a) was an inferential one. Candidates were asked to deduce, from the description of the sun being *in the right place for us to get the best result*, what that 'best result' might be. The answer required reference to the quality of the picture and there were many who correctly offered 'a good', 'a clear' or 'a perfect' picture, of the creature. This correctly reflected the idea of the most suitable lighting from the sun's position. There were quite a number of answers which did not score because they focused on the light itself, on the sun's brightness, or on the way that it showed the chevrotain clearly, rather than on the result of this in terms of the photograph or film.

Question 7(b) again required candidates to understand inference and to explain why the writer thought the chevrotain *would not move* when they let her out of the cage. The answer lay at the start of the paragraph: she was tame. We are told that the writer was worried that the chevrotain would not move *given her nature*. Candidates had to look back to find a reference to the 'nature' of the animal which could explain why this was the case. 'Because she was trying to jam herself into her water bowl', or was 'playing around' are only examples of that nature, showing that she was used to the humans around her; that she was tame. Many candidates did not understand the phrase *given her nature*, some suggesting those words alone as the answer; others thought she had been given 'nature', as if it were a gift from the writer. The better candidates, however, understood the phrase and went back through the paragraph, found the word 'tame' and rightly inferred that this would have resulted in the possibility of the chevrotain not moving.

Question 7(c) asked candidates what was conveyed by the writer's use of the word *shot*, which would not have been conveyed had he used the simple word 'ran'. All but the weakest responses scored here, recognising the speed conveyed by this image, the suddenness or the force of the chevrotain's movement when she 'shot' across the set. A very small number suggested that it conveyed the action of the camera which was taking the photograph.

In **Question 7(d)** candidates were asked to pick out the 4 consecutive words which showed that the writer's colleagues reacted immediately to the chevrotain's running away. The required phrase was 'as if by magic'. Common wrong answers were 'dropped what they were doing' and 'assembled on the scene' which do not, alone, necessarily convey immediacy.

Question 8(a) tested candidates' ability to interpret the writer's use of imagery, asking them to suggest two ways in which the simile of the team members as 'a swarm of hungry locusts' was effective. Most made a reasonably good attempt to do so, the majority recognising the large number of members in the team as similar to the high numbers of locusts in a 'swarm'. Also implicit in the word 'swarm' is the idea that the group, like insects moved everywhere, as one, and moved quickly; the first of two marks could be scored for suggesting any one of these comparisons. All of these alternatives were seen regularly. Many also gained the second mark for seeing a similarity in the locusts' 'hunger' for food and the team members' 'hunger' or

eagerness or desire for the cash reward offered for catching the animal. The simplest way of expressing the similarity was to emphasise that they wanted to get the reward or to catch the animal or to all try to get 'the same thing'. Weaker responses which were not rewarded focused only on the locusts, without suggesting how they compared with the humans, or introduced unsuitable synonyms for 'eagerness' such as 'aggression' and 'determination'. Only one or two misinterpreted the simile entirely suggesting that Philip's roar of triumph could be compared with the locusts.

Question 8(b) There were two parts to this question which asked, first, how the writer wanted the chevrotain to behave on the film set and, secondly, how she did in fact behave there. The two halves were best approached quite separately, to ensure clarity. The required answer for the first part was 'they wanted her to splash in the water and eat beetles/snails'. A common response to the first part was 'He wanted her to behave beautifully' which was incomplete as it did not explain what the 'beautiful' behaviour was. Equally, when candidates merely lifted the fact that she behaved beautifully, 'splashing in water and eating snails and beetles' *when in her cage*, the attempt could not be rewarded. To avoid ambiguity of place, they needed to point out that this was how the writer *wanted* her to behave *on the film set*. The second part looked for a description of how she actually did behave i.e. *as if she had a pair of leopards on her tail*. The expected answer was 'she ran away' or 'she kept running away'. Frequently, this was answered with a lift of *as if she had a pair of leopards on her tail* with no interpretation of the simile. Many responses gained 1 of the 2 marks available, with answers such as: 'He wanted her to behave as she did in the cage but she began to run away again,' or 'He wanted her to behave as she did in her natural habitat but she ran off as if she was being chased.' The mark for the second idea was awarded more frequently than the for the first idea. Only the best candidates gained both marks.

Question 8(c) was the second question which required candidates to answer in their own words, explaining how the chevrotain reacted to being replaced in her cage. Some misinterpreted the instruction and explained how she behaved once she was in there i.e. lying placidly on a banana leaf and munching beetles. The animal's initial reaction pinpointed the key words to be replaced as *astonished* and *fuss*. The key words were identified in the majority of scripts, with both marks sometimes being achieved. 'amazed', 'shocked' and 'astounded' were frequently acceptable synonyms for *astonished*; the most common synonyms offered for *fuss* were 'commotion', 'trouble' and 'bother' with 'drama', 'excitement' and the colloquial 'big deal' all being rewarded. Words such as 'uproar', and 'rowdiness', which focused on noise in particular, rather than general commotion, were not given a mark.

Question 9 was the customary vocabulary question. Candidates were required to show their understanding, in context, but not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Fewer candidates than usual scored the full 5 marks. Attempts to define the chosen words by using them in a sentence are now very rare. Candidates have obviously been advised to avoid such a technique; it will not score because it does not explain what the words mean, which is the purpose of the question. All eight words appeared to a greater or lesser extent, with some accurate definitions and many interesting but unacceptable attempts.

Grow and *prime*, were popular choices and the most frequently correct. The former was usually defined as 'turn' or 'become', but a common error was to take the word out of its textual context and replace it with 'develop' or 'increase', neither of which makes sense in the passage. 'Important', 'major' and 'main' were the usual alternatives for *prime*; 'good', 'perfect' and 'first' were common misinterpretations. *Passion* was another frequent choice, explained most commonly as 'desire', a 'strong' or 'great' love, 'feeling' or 'affection'; 'liking' or even 'strong liking' were seen as too weak an emotion, as were unqualified words such as 'love', 'affection', 'fondness' and so on. *Expansive*, defined variously as 'big', 'large', 'wide', 'massive' and, often, 'spacious', frequently gained a mark, though it was misread, at times, as 'expensive' and thus the definition of it as 'costly' or 'dear' were seen and denied. *Jam* was attempted frequently but it was rare to find an accurate explanation; 'squeeze' and 'force' were acceptable synonyms, as were 'wedge', 'pack' and 'squish'. 'Stuck' was a common misconception, given the context, and 'hit' appeared so often that it suggests a local use which is not generally recognised. *Bashful*, when selected, was almost always seen correctly as 'shy', with 'timid' and 'retiring' as acceptable alternatives, while offering words such as 'restless', 'fast', 'destructive' and 'naughty' suggested that candidates were simply guessing. *Daintily* and *placidly* were chosen less frequently than the other words. 'Delicately' and 'gracefully' were the best synonyms seen for *daintily* and the majority of wrong answers were either 'gently' or 'carefully'. *Placidly* was best defined as 'calmly' or 'peacefully'; some incorrect expressions such as 'comfortably' and 'idly' were understandable attempts, given the context, but others were further from the real meaning, e.g. 'flatly', 'weakly' and 'helplessly'.

In the vocabulary question understanding only is being tested so correct grammatical form was not insisted on, as long as meaning was clear. Thus, for *placidly*, the adjective 'relaxed' was accepted; for the verb 'grow', a definition in a different tense, such as 'became' would be rewarded.

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Some of the lower scores were occasionally due to candidates offering two alternative answers; this is not good practice, as only the first of two distinct responses will be credited.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22

Reading

Key messages

A thorough reading of the whole passage, particularly of the fiction text, is recommended before beginning to answer the questions. Closer reading of the whole text before tackling the questions would help to clarify the narrative and the sequence and logic of events described in the text. As in past years, many candidates showed a good understanding of the summary passage, but experienced more difficulty in responding to the detailed demands of the comprehension questions. In both summary and comprehension exercises, close reading and careful attention to detail brought the best results.

Candidates are also advised to read every question in advance. It should also be noted that each question focuses on a different aspect of the text, so candidates are advised not to give the same answer to more than one question.

Many candidates experienced difficulties with questions in which they were required to answer in their own words. In this type of question, candidates should couch their synonyms of key words in sentence form, so that 'concealment - hiding, show up – appear' in **Question 6(a)** was seen as not answering the question.

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

Candidates are advised to ensure they spell correctly any uncommon words given them in the passage (e.g. kinetoscope) and to give capital letters to any words in the original which have them – 'Hindi' and 'Sanskrit'.

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

There were fewer cases than in some recent sessions of the use in **Question 1(a)**, of ellipsis, as ininstead of writing out the points in full. Use of ellipsis leads to the loss of points and it is important that teachers continue to draw their candidates' attention to the fact that this is not an acceptable form of communication, even in note-form, in an examination.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates should aim to improve accuracy of noun-verb agreement, the omission of definite or indefinite articles, or intrusive use of the article where none is required. Work needs to be done on the use of connectives such as 'however' and 'furthermore' to ensure that these are used appropriately. Candidates should also practise linking the first words of their summary to the given words.

Candidates need practice in recognising the difference between opinion and fact in the first, non-fiction, passage, although there was much more success with this type of question this session than last. In general, practice is needed in identifying when a writer is speaking for himself/herself and offering a view which another might challenge.

General Comments

Candidates were to answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. As in previous sessions, Passage 1 seemed to be more accessible than Passage 2, as Passage 2 required understanding of implied meanings and some aspects of imagery and writer's craft.

Even the weakest responses engaged with the tasks and the texts. There were very few incomplete scripts, although there were more questions than in previous sessions where answers were not attempted. Most candidates appeared to have been well prepared by their teachers, showing themselves to be familiar with the types of questions likely to be asked. In general they coped well with the layout of the answer booklets.

In **Question 1(a)** points which required fewer elements, or which could be lifted straight from the text in a few words, were more frequently made. Many candidates did not score certain points as they named a device/feature without enlarging on its effect.

Many candidates gave half a content point in one bullet, then finished the point in another bullet – they need to make sure that what they write makes sense on its own and contains the main element of that point.

This session there were perhaps a greater-than-usual number of points placed in the wrong box. These points are not rewarded.

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

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

The format of the summary question, both **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)**, largely prevented candidates from writing to excess, copying verbatim at length or producing both fair and rough copies. There was more irrelevance noted and evidence of candidates diverging from the rubric into areas of their own knowledge or experience of aspects of cinema.

In **Question 1(b)**, where candidates were to write up their note form content points in formal, continuous prose, there were some commendable results among those who made a sustained attempt to use their own words and original structures. Others needed to include more originality of expression in order to achieve high marks. The majority of candidates made at least some attempt to use own words and almost all wrote to the required length. Better responses took ownership of the text without straying from the content. These responses were secure in expression and had a real overview and understanding.

However, in **Question 1(b)**, many candidates did not manage a successful link between the opening words and their continuation of the sentence. Many simply tagged on “Racehorse photographed...”etc.

Linking words were sometimes used in an arbitrary or inaccurate way. These need to be used carefully in context.

Both spelling and punctuation were good.

Comments on specific questions: Section 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 30% of the total marks for the paper. Candidates were asked to identify the stages in the development and rise in popularity of the cinema, and the reasons for its continuing popularity today, as outlined in the passage. The summary had to be based on Paragraphs 2-6, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they 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. Where marks were denied it was usually because key words or phrases were missing, or because the candidate had strayed into irrelevant sections of the text. Some responses were able to reach the maximum 15 marks; candidates who identified in excess of 15 content points could be awarded only 15 marks. The exercise was fully discriminating as almost the whole range of marks could be found.

Excluding the provided content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 18 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination up to a maximum of 15 points, carrying one mark each. Most candidates expressed the points either in note form or in short sentences; some responses presented long, verbatim copies of the text for each content point. Candidates were not instructed to use bullet points, although the sample points given to assist them used bullets; however, most candidates used bullet points, seeming to realise that it would help them to focus more clearly on identifying content points if they were presented under bullets.

Paragraphs 2, 3, and 4 referred to the stages in the development and rise in popularity of the cinema, and there were 11 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. In Paragraph 2, there were 4 content points, (excluding the provided first point) about the development and rise in popularity of the cinema. A camera was invented which could take ten consecutive pictures simultaneously, the kinoscope showed strips of images in sequence, the film projector allowed films to be shown to many people simultaneously, and events, or acrobats and sporting events, could be shown repeatedly. Where marks were lost in this paragraph it tended to be because of incomplete points being made: the pictures taken under the first point had to be consecutive, the kinoscope had to take pictures in sequence, the film projector had to show films to many people and to these people simultaneously, and reference to generalised events was preferred for the last point. Although the lift of 'acrobats and sporting events' was acceptable, both elements had to be given.

There were 2 content points in Paragraph 3, which were that permanent cinemas were built, and enough films were made to allow programmes to be made which lasted for half an hour. There was much success with the first of these points but less with the second, where most often the essential element was missing, namely that enough films were made; most candidates wrote that films were very short, missing the fact that it was combining these short films which led to the development of cinema.

In Paragraph 4, there were a further 4 content points. Silent films were accompanied by live music, narrators filled in the missing parts of the story or film, sound was added which played alongside the film, and finally sound was added on to the film itself. These last two points could be made simply by reference to 'sound on disc' and 'sound on film'.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the reasons for the continuing popularity of cinema today. In Paragraph 5, candidates could make 4 points (excluding the provided first point): the first three were that sophisticated camerawork means that audiences can see clearly the emotions of the characters, or can relate the characters' situations to their own lives, films about issues can be a force for good in the world or can shape the way people think, and cinemas keep heritages alive. Some candidates confused the example of Bollywood movies, or films about Indian epics and Sanskrit drama, as being the only aspects of cinema which keep heritages alive, and thus the point here was often incompletely or obliquely made. The final possible content point in this paragraph was that the different genres or types of film made sure that there was entertainment for all.

In Paragraph 6, it was possible to find 4 content points: wide screens make it easier to show spectacular or extravagant films, computer graphics or animations improve film quality, celebrity actors, or film stars, can be good role models, and videos and DVDs can be watched at home.

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

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary, in their own words, of the stages in the development and rise in popularity of the cinema, and the reasons for its continuing popularity today, as outlined in the passage. They were asked to write no more than 160 words (the first ten of which were given), within the space available in the answer booklet.

Most candidates completed the exercise and most were able to do so comfortably within the given space. There were a number of candidates who used their own words in a sustained manner and in a style which was always accurate, containing original complex structures. The general use of own words for some candidates was noticeable, with many candidates being innovative or original in their use of English; many others selected from, edited and restructured the text well, while others moved blocks of text around rather than re-wording detail, or copied from the text. Connectives or adverbs were sometimes used with little understanding of the meaning.

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

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

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

Question 2 was based on Paragraph 1, and asked candidates to decide whether each of three statements from the paragraph were either true or false or not stated in the passage. The first of these statements – that cinema was not invented by one person – was true, as the passage referred to cinema being the result of global endeavour. The second statement – that ordinary life is full of excitement – was false, as the passage referred to excitement being repressed in ordinary life. The veracity or otherwise of the third statement – that detective stories began in the nineteenth century – was not stated in the passage, as the only reference to the nineteenth century was in connection with cinema and not to detective stories. The whole range of possible marks was seen here, with few classifying all three statements correctly. Candidates found the third statement the most challenging.

In **Question 3** candidates were to select and write down one opinion from Paragraph 3. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the word was 'astonishing', thus supplying the opinion that it is astonishing that in the USA by 1907 there were 4000 cinemas. There was a reasonable degree of success here. The most common incorrect answer was that the programmes could be changed weekly when the audience got bored.

In **Question 4**, candidates were to select and write down one opinion from Paragraph 6, the subjective words being 'much better'; thus supplying the opinion that 'trips to the cinema are much better than watching television at home.' A common wrong answer was that film stars might be good role models. Candidates need to learn that sentences with conditional ideas such as 'may' and 'might' leave room for doubt and hesitation and so are unlikely to be the writer's opinion.

Comments on specific questions: Section 2

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

Question 5(a) asked for the reason why the pile of straw heaved 'gently and rhythmically'; this question required candidates to make the connection to 'sleeping' in the context, providing the answer that an animal or a creature or a kusimanse was sleeping, or breathing, underneath it. Many candidates were not awarded the mark because, although they wrote that the kusimanse was sleeping, they did not refer to it being under the straw.

For **Question 5(b)** the answer could be lifted at 'this was a creature I was likely to meet on my forthcoming travels to photograph animals'. However, many candidates implied that the writer wanted to photograph the animal in the zoo without reference to his trip in the future. A common misconception was that he disturbed the animal in order to photograph it. Some repeated that he rattled his thumbnail along the bars of the cage, which was to answer 'how' he disturbed the animal rather than 'why', which was what the question asked.

In **Question 5(c)** following the sequence of the text, the answer was that the creature saw or noticed the nuts, although 'he / it wanted to eat the nuts' was an acceptable response.

Most candidates found **Question 5(d)** relatively accessible, the answer being that he / it hoped to get more nuts, or that more nuts were forthcoming. For 'nuts', 'food' or 'titbits' or 'snacks' were interchangeable. When the answer was incorrect, it was often because of lifting of 'no more titbits were forthcoming', which was the

opposite of the answer intended. There was misunderstanding in that some thought it was the writer who had 'hope' and not the animal.

Question 6(a) asked for the reason why the writer had ample opportunity to get to know the kusimanses, and was the first of the questions on the Paper which required candidates to answer in their own words, the key words being 'concealment' for the first available mark, and the key words being 'show up.' for the second mark available. Acceptable synonyms for 'concealment' were 'hiding' or 'under cover' or even 'camouflage', and for 'show up' acceptable synonyms were 'appear' and 'arrive' or even simply 'come'. Some candidates seemed to think that 'concealment' was a concrete noun, offering word such as 'shelter' or 'tent'. Others had not understood the move in the passage from the zoo trip of the previous paragraph to the real trip of the paragraph containing the words 'concealment' and 'show up'.

Question 6(b) asked for the two problems the writer encountered when he tried to feed the babies with cotton wool dipped in milk, the answers being (i) that they spat it out (ii) that they swallowed, or ate, it. There was much success with this question, but if candidates were confused in (i) into thinking that it was milk alone he was feeding them, this would negate the answer. For example 'they spat it out' was acceptable, with 'it' being understood to mean the cotton wool dipped in milk. But 'they spat the milk out' was an incorrect answer. 'Cotton' or 'wool' (alone) were accepted for 'cotton wool'. Sometimes 'they struggled and squeaked' was given as an answer; this was incorrect as, although true, it was too weak and oblique to be considered a problem faced by the writer, but was merely a gloss on the animals' behaviour. Sometimes candidates were distracted here by the reference to 'monsters' in lines 15-16.

In **Question 7(a)**, candidates were asked for the effect of the writer's use of 'sprawling' instead of lying. As with most questions on writer's craft, candidates found this challenging. The correct answer was that 'sprawling' created the effect of laziness, relaxation, lack of energy or lethargy. Many candidates gave the meaning and not the effect. Many others seemed not to know, or to be able to infer, the meaning of 'sprawling', thinking it must mean the opposite of 'lying' in the stem of the question and writing, for example, that they were moving, wriggling, or crawling. A correct inference had to be based on the word being like, and not opposite to, 'lying', because otherwise it would have been unlikely that the writer would have used it instead of 'lying' as the question asked.

In **Question 7(b)**, candidates were asked which physical development meant that the kusimanses were able to 'see the world that lay outside their baskets', the answer being that their legs became stronger. Answers such as 'they learned to walk' or 'their legs got longer' were incorrect but not enough to negate a correct answer. However, many candidates referred to their front teeth appearing, which had nothing to do with the animals beginning to move around, and so this answer was not only incorrect but also negated a correct answer when one was given.

In **Question 7(c)**, candidates were asked to pick out and write down the three consecutive words which indicated the sudden way in which the babies were prevented from seeing 'the world that lay outside their baskets', the correct answer being 'an abrupt halt'. There was a fair degree of success with this question, but it seemed that many candidates did not know the meaning of 'consecutive' offering instead three single, unrelated words at random. The most common incorrect answers were 'scrambling excitedly around' 'bit my toe' and 'bare foot sticking'.

Question 8(a) was an inferential one, in which candidates were asked what the word 'merely' suggested about the many troubles the writer would have in the future, and all but the most discerning candidates found challenging. Most candidates referred in their answer to the multiplicity of troubles in the future – there would be many, or there would be more – whereas the presence of the word 'many' in the question should have indicated that this was not the answer, but only a duplication of the question stem. The correct answer had to focus on degree, and not number; the word 'merely' showed that there would be worse (not more) troubles in the future, or that the current troubles were as nothing to what were to come.

In **Question 8(b)**, candidates were asked why 'bandits' was an appropriate name for the kusimanses. This question tended to be badly done, as the majority of candidates opted for the text at line 28 – 'they had become such a nuisance that I named them the Bandits' - writing consequently that the name 'bandits' was an appropriate one because the animals were a nuisance. This, however, was not a reason for calling them bandits but merely the preamble to this name for them. Correct answers lay in decoding the image that bandits are thieves or robbers, although the idea that they caused havoc or destruction was also allowed.

Question 8(c) asked why the kusimanses grew fast, and was the second of the questions on the Paper where candidates were asked to answer in their own words. Careful reading of the passage showed that the answer had to come after the connective 'because' at line 29, leading on to the answer that they grew fast

'because their appetites seemed insatiable' the key words to be re-cast being 'appetites' and 'insatiable'. Acceptable synonyms for 'appetites' were 'hunger', 'desire or passion or simple wanting to, eat / have food.' Acceptable synonyms for 'insatiable' were 'infinite', or 'endless' or 'could not be fulfilled'. The expression 'could not be satisfied', although conveying the correct meaning, was not an acceptable answer here, as it is too close to the original word 'insatiable'. The answer could be successfully made with succinct responses such as 'they were always hungry'. Frequent answers were that the animals ate a lot or that they were well-fed; although these did not give the meaning of 'insatiable appetites' they were regarded as a gloss on otherwise correct answers.

In **Question 8(d)** candidates were asked to explain what the 'state' of the kusiamnses was, the answer being that they were covered in eggs. Candidates found it challenging to make the link between the animals breaking the eggs and the expression 'judging by the state of them'. Many candidates wrote that the state was their appearance, but then did not explain what this appearance was; others wrote that they had broken the eggs, without the result of this activity; others misunderstood the use of 'state' in this context, referring, incorrectly, to the country or realm of the animals.

Question 9(a) asked for the evidence that Colly was a vain creature, the answer being that she spent a lot of time grooming her coat, or her tail, or even herself. Many candidates wrote, incorrectly, that she was tame, and this was enough to deny a correct answer when one was made because it was so far removed from the idea of vanity. However, if candidates included reference to Colly enjoying a siesta or sunbathing, or to the writer being befriended by Colly in a correct answer, it was ignored and the mark was awarded.

Question 9(b) was an inferential question, asking for the implications of the expression 'something or other', which suggested lack of discrimination. Thus correct answers were that the animals ate anything, or that they ate everything, or that they were not fussy about what they ate.

In **Question 9(c)**, candidates were asked to explain fully why the kusimanses were 'three feet off the ground'. There were two reasons why the creatures were three feet off the ground. Firstly, they had bitten Colly's tail, or they had their teeth sunk into Colly's tail and, secondly, Colly climbed a tree, (with the animals hanging on to Colly's tail by their teeth.) Candidates had to visualise a fairly dense section of text here at lines 41 – 45, and there was much success in this respect.

Question 11 was the customary vocabulary question, in which candidates were required to show their understanding in context, not necessarily in direct synonyms, of five words from a choice of eight. Candidates did not score particularly well here, showing the need for them to work on vocabulary building. The most frequently correct answer was 'problem', 'pest' or 'troublemaker' for 'nuisance', although some answers given were considered to be too strong, such as 'disaster' or 'chaos'. Most candidates who attempted 'captivated' scored the mark for synonyms such as 'fascinated', 'attracted', or 'mesmerised'; 'interested' was too weak, and many candidates confused 'captivated' with 'captured', writing, incorrectly, synonyms such as 'took prisoner'. A reasonable degree of success was gained by candidates who offered 'unfortunately', 'sadly' or 'it is a pity' for 'alas'; 'least' or 'as little as possible' could be substituted for 'minimum' but comparatives such as 'less' were not sufficient to score the mark. For 'regret' a mark could be scored for 'sorrow', 'sadness' or 'unhappiness', although 'remorse' was considered to be too strong and therefore incorrect. Synonyms for 'somewhat' were 'a bit' or 'rather', or 'quite', and in fact there were many acceptable synonyms here. Correct synonyms for 'apparently' were 'seemingly' looking like' or 'as far as one could tell'. 'Appraised' was almost never attempted, where acceptable synonyms were 'judged', 'gauged' or 'summed up'.

The full range of marks was seen here, although there were very few instances of all five marks being scored. Because understanding only was being tested in the vocabulary question, grammatical form was not insisted upon. Candidates can improve their performance by ensuring that they select five words only and explain the meanings of those words. Only one synonym for each word or phrase should be offered.