

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/11

Passages for Comment

Key messages

In preparing for this paper, candidates need to ensure that they read a wide range of material from a range of diverse sources, such as travel writing, memoirs, biographies, autobiographies, newspaper articles, magazine features, blogs, advertisements and advertorials, as well as online sources. This will better prepare candidates to assess the conventions and language associated with different formats and genres, and also to comment on the effects and qualities conveyed by specific words and phrases. They should be able to comment on how a particular extract is structured in the way that it unfolds and develops in terms of content, mood and tone. Candidates should also be able to explore the contrasts and differences between the sections of a given extract; they need to progress beyond identifying essential aspects of language and style such as personification, alliteration and punctuation so that the effects of such features are considered in relation to their context and the extract as a whole.

In terms of writing, candidates need to be able to adapt their own writing styles to incorporate diverse directed writing tasks, for example, letters, articles, diaries, and demonstrate secure familiarity with their conventions and style. Borrowing of phrases from the original extract is not recommended. A secure degree of technical accuracy, especially in the use of spelling, punctuation and tenses, is required at this level.

General comments

The passages proved to be accessible and engaging, and afforded a good choice for candidates. They also provided a spread of marks, allowing candidates at the top of the range to do themselves justice and also candidates at the lower end of the range to relate to the material. There was a generally focused and encouraging response to the passages.

There was a general improvement in the overall standard of response this session. On the whole, candidates seemed to rely less on feature spotting and listing, displaying a far clearer determination to connect example to effect. In such cases, even when this was not particularly successful or sophisticated, it was evident that the teaching had been aimed at finding and showing connections. Indeed, while there are still some candidates who just engage in efforts to spot techniques or linguistic features without developing detailed comments on the effects of such processes, it was evident that this was the choice of individual candidates and not whole Centres: it was clear that candidates are being taught to analyse.

However, quite a number of candidates spend too much of their time covering different literary and linguistic features isolated from the contexts and purposes of passages and these are reproduced in isolation as if they had a validity even when separated from meaning and effect: valuable time could be spent more effectively on selecting a few of these identified features, quoting them and, then, most importantly, commenting on the ideas and qualities they convey in terms of tone, purpose and inference. Some candidates also spend a disproportionate amount of time identifying genre and audience, a process which should be employed only as a useful, concise introductory approach before moving on to a recognition and exploration of the distinctiveness of texts and language use. Candidates are not served well by spotting a type of text and assuming its features and effects are self-evident. The extracts are quite long, but even so, a more productive approach might be to explore the process of meaning making as it develops rather than cutting straight to conclusions, or at any rate, making some time for close reading.

The directed writing questions gave scope for candidates to use their own knowledge and experience creatively and this gave some authenticity to style and mood. A lot of responses showed sophisticated and perceptive understanding of tone, viewpoint and style. Some answers proved to be rather uneven in their outcome: some lost marks due to errors in accuracy and expression – areas which could be addressed include the use of consistent tenses and selection of tone and voice. There was a noticeable increase in

candidates exceeding the word boundary for directed writing and Centres need to draw attention to this for candidates to stay within the limits.

There were some examples of rubric infringement, varying from omitting a whole question to answering **section (a)** systematically in favour of **section (b)**. Only a very few attempted three questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular question answered well in a number of cases. Candidates seemed to be able to relate to the 16 year-old's angst and most found something useful to say about her feelings. Candidates seemed able to appreciate the feelings involved in leaving home or a homeland. There was a degree of empathy in evidence where this occurred. There were some successful efforts to engage with the material and unpick the language and its effects. In some responses, candidates sometimes became preoccupied with this writer's objections to leaving Zimbabwe and saw her as being difficult and awkward, rather than picking up on the poignancy of the passage. Those responses which focused on the metaphor of the avocados and the Shona proverb tended to create more engaging answers. In less secure answers, there was some confusion about the writer's attitude and key features were often missed.
- (b) Many candidates picked up on the appropriate tone of loss and reluctance to leave effectively, often listing well-chosen items they would miss about the country. The idea of leaving a country was mostly well answered and even where candidates had not identified tone when analysing the original, they were easily able to create similar feelings when describing a further departure. Some very good answers were generated by this question on this passage. Some responses explored how the narrator's life had changed in her new environment, yet managed to echo the feelings of unease combined with a sense of nostalgic loss apparent in the original extract. Responses in the lower to middle part of the range tended to simply replicate the original situation twenty years later. Less successful answers were sometimes confused, and needed to exhibit a greater degree of control and a greater variety of emotions.

Question 2

- (a) A number of candidates seemed to engage well with this passage and were able to identify the depressive tone. The more able responses were able to contrast the celebrity legend of Sinatra with the reality of the aging man and to comment on the use of images, such as his voice as an 'uninsurable jewel' and the similes of Picasso and the Ferrari. Such answers explored the setting and location, exploring the feeling of isolation the protagonist found himself in and his almost compulsive determination to remain in this state, cut off from those immediately round him and those figures in the rest of his working life who seemed to be placing inordinate pressure upon him.
- In less effective responses candidates misread the nuances of the passage, confusing all of the females mentioned and variously conveying Sinatra as a womaniser, misogynist, lonely old man or has-been.
- (b) In answers at the top of the range, there were some successful interpretations of the task, with some candidates catching what seemed to be a very believable voice. Indeed, the most successful answers were able to replicate the sense of frustration and disillusionment and write in the form of a diary entry. In the middle of the range, answers were reasonably accomplished. Less secure answers tended to focus on the girls – or sometimes missed the point and wrote about what a good night it had been.

Question 3

- (a) At the top of the range, candidates seemed to enjoy the material and produced some interesting commentaries which offered insights into the relationship between the girl and the robot. There was some solid awareness of how she seemed to be an innocent, if rather wilful and spoilt, child used to getting her own way and issuing orders. The robot, however, was also seen as a character in his own right, one endowed with human characteristics and feelings. The developing interaction was tracked with some perceptive understanding. Whilst less engaged answers picked up on the attachment between the girl and the robot, many struggled to comment on the way in which this was conveyed to us. A lot of these responses to the passage seemed instead to be focused much more on content rather than style and language. A few answers did not realise that Robbie was a robot.
- (b) Candidates seemed to be successful at recreating the tone and style of the piece within their own writing. There were some very sensitive creative pieces which were matched very closely with the style of the original passage. Indeed, Examiners noted that the directed writing here was consistently purposeful and had evident engagement. Many sensed the apparent innocence of the child and the ways in which she manipulated Robbie: others sensed the developing reactions of the robot in response to her treatment of him.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/12
Passages for Comment

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General comments

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There was a general improvement in the overall standard of response this session. On the whole, candidates seemed to rely less on feature spotting and listing, displaying a far clearer determination to connect example to effect. In such cases, even when this was not particularly successful or sophisticated, it was evident that the teaching had been aimed at finding and showing connections. Indeed, while there are still some candidates who just engage in efforts to spot techniques or linguistic features without developing detailed comments on the effects of such processes, it was evident that this was the choice of individual candidates and not whole Centres: it was clear that candidates are being taught to analyse.

However, quite a number of candidates spend too much of their time covering different literary and linguistic features isolated from the contexts and purposes of passages and these are reproduced in isolation as if they had a validity even when separated from meaning and effect: valuable time could be spent more effectively on selecting a few of these identified features, quoting them and, then, most importantly, commenting on the ideas and qualities they convey in terms of tone, purpose and inference. Some candidates also spend a disproportionate amount of time identifying genre and audience, a process which should be employed only as a useful, concise introductory approach before moving on to a recognition and exploration of the distinctiveness of texts and language use. Candidates are not served well by spotting a type of text and assuming its features and effects are self-evident. The extracts are quite long, but even so, a more productive approach might be to explore the process of meaning making as it develops rather than cutting straight to conclusions, or at any rate, making some time for close reading.

The directed writing questions gave scope for candidates to use their own knowledge and experience creatively and this gave some authenticity to style and mood. A lot of responses showed sophisticated and perceptive understanding of tone, viewpoint and style. Some answers proved to be rather uneven in their outcome: some lost marks due to errors in accuracy and expression – areas which could be addressed include the use of consistent tenses and selection of tone and voice. There was a noticeable increase in

candidates exceeding the word boundary for directed writing and Centres need to draw attention to this for candidates to stay within the limits.

There were some examples of rubric infringement, varying from omitting a whole question to answering **section (a)** systematically in favour of **section (b)**. Only a very few attempted three questions.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was an enjoyable passage and most candidates engaged with it; there were some excellent answers which showed thorough appreciation of the writer's feelings, first in Beijing and later with the hiking group. Candidates were fully aware of the dichotomy between the two locations and the writer's response to them. This, therefore, produced some considered analysis of the passage with candidates perceiving the ironic tone and sarcasm.

Answers in the middle of the range recognised the chatty informal style of the piece, with its elements of self-mockery at the start, and appreciated the change in tone, from apprehensive at the start to more relaxed and comfortable later. In such answers the language features were generally well recognised and understood.

Less effective answers laboured the point of the opening sentence and explained in great detail the value of the rhetorical question and what it said about the character of the writer. The content, with its tone of self-mockery, escaped a few candidates completely: they seemed to miss the point of the piece and ended up claiming that the narrator was selfish and not a religious man because he would not go on a pilgrimage to Tiananmen Square like other tourists.

- (b) On the whole, the task was quite well done in terms of describing a visit to another location or country, with some suitable local colour and wildlife. The most effective responses imitated the style of the original, and also observed the progression from feeling out of place at first, but more at ease later, in less conventional surroundings. Such perceptive answers managed to include the writer's feelings about being a tourist and what could be done to alleviate it.

In the middle to lower part of the range, the writing produced some effective attempts, although some were derivative of the original passage. Those who branched out with their own ideas gained more reward for having understood the general purpose of the passage and adapting it to their own agenda.

One or two candidates fell into the trap of copying rather too slavishly from the original and using many of its phrases and structures with their own words inserted here and there.

Question 2

- (a) This was a popular choice and generally well handled. It was, by and large, well done and provided candidates with broad opportunities to show their ability to recognise the contextual and linguistic aspects that make it successful as a piece of writing.

As a result, there were some excellent answers showing perceptive and consistent appreciation. Language features were identified and generally well connected to effect. Effective responses were able to see the humour and tone of the passage and to draw some moral message from the incidents described. They recognised and were able to engage with the techniques used by the writer: for example, the descriptions of the car and the writer's relationship with it. Similarly, such answers were able to appreciate that the piece was mainly light-hearted in tone in spite of the seriousness of the accident. The irony of the fire-hydrant preventing it from being even more serious was acknowledged with some perception.

Less effective answers merely commented on one or two language devices and some thought Vitali Vitaliev had a disease – that he was afraid of fire. A number of such candidates thought the writer was taking his test rather than having a lesson, and in such interpretations there were quite a few misconceptions about the pagoda-like fire hydrants: others went off at a tangent, condemning the writer as being irreligious because he was not prepared to pray at 'those small roadside temples.'

- (b) This question was well done and in some cases, very well done. The directed writing was clearly enjoyed and Kevin's voice was sometimes genuinely funny: indeed, there was often a sense of character in the writing. There were a number of hilarious pieces, some of which captured the irony and humour of the passage very well.

In the middle of the range, writing from the point of view of the instructor produced a variety of responses, most of them sympathetic towards the driver but a few very unsympathetic. Some did not reach the point of describing the accident itself, but a few glossed over it without dealing with its true impact. Most understood the need to describe the thoughts and feelings of the instructor rather than merely relating events.

In the lower part of the range, a very few slipped up by describing the driver's point of view rather than the instructor's. In this area there was some prudery about Vitali's autophilia and not everyone fully understood the fire hydrant connection. Technically, such responses tended to display confusion of tenses, uneven spellings and, at times, misunderstanding of the question.

Question 3

- (a) This passage was also popular and obviously enjoyed. The passage was accessible to all candidates and many were able to engage with the lack of understanding of the characters and their vulnerability. The dichotomy between the language in the passage and the simplicity of the characters was picked up on by the best candidates. There was secure exploration of the tension, the mystery, the character of Moon-Watcher and the focus on survival; some responses contained a discussion of how fear and suspense were sustained by the writer. There was some close analysis of language, looking at the sensual writing, which allowed for higher marks, as did range – such as addressing the dramatic 'cliff-hanger' at the end.

Other effective responses tackled the question well and with some enthusiasm, well aware that the piece was fiction. They commented on how the author went about representing an era about which we know relatively little. They were able to separate out the events of the story from the author's viewpoint on the main character.

Less engaged answers sometimes found it difficult to identify the writer's style and language choices and relied heavily on re-telling the story without developing further comment on the language, focusing instead on the action. Even so, a number of such responses were able to pick out the tension and the mystery: yet others seemed unable to understand the primitive life.

- (b) There were some very good answers to this question, which creatively engaged with the nature of the object. These continuing stories often focused on the tension and the compelling noise, appreciating the need to maintain and enhance the passage's tone of mystery and suspense, with hints of menace. These candidates produced some very impressive writing. In the middle of the range, too, most candidates wrote reasonably well on the passage, giving some credible outcomes and managing to sustain the suspense of the original.

Less effective answers seemed to have limited ideas on how to progress the story and merely prolonged the original idea in a rather pedestrian way. They drew on a variety of scenarios which included a search or hypnotised progress. These were often quite effective in ambition, though they needed to make a greater attempt to reproduce the style of the original.

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

- (a) This was a popular question and most candidates showed engagement with it, focusing especially on the entrance into Sydney harbour. Other effective answers focused on the tongue-in-cheek humour, noting, for example, the over-exaggeration of ‘tears like waterfalls’ and how the piece showed the writer’s acknowledgement of his naivety. Such answers were thorough and ensured that they covered the piece from beginning to end. Answers in the middle of the range tended to grasp the presence of Jacobson’s voice (though perhaps not always completely understanding all of its significance): key features were generally recognised. They also demonstrated creditable attempts to comment on language, perhaps because of the bravura effects, and usually offered a sound sense of character – again as a result of conspicuous rhetorical features.

Answers lower down the range tended to focus on the character’s drinking in some cases and this was misinterpreted: there was also some confusion over the journey on occasions. These responses seemed to miss the humour entirely.

- (b) This directed writing task was usually quite well done because there was plenty of latitude in possibilities. Creative interpretations took the writer off somewhere else, but kept him as a writer/teacher. They used a different mode of transport (showing some attempt at creativity). Many candidates were able to focus on the narrator’s dreams and hopes in the new place whilst looking back fondly on Sydney. Most candidates chose a place they knew. Some used their own country and were able to use their knowledge to write, using some detail and development, thereby often making good use of their own experience and/or residence to give substance to writing. Thus, directed writing was either perceptive or largely competent.

In less secure pieces the writing exercise was very derivative, suggesting a lack of confidence on the part of the candidates.

Question 2

- (a) This question was popular. There were particularly good accounts of the underlying terror of the ocean and some very mature understanding of the different tones of the passage, particularly in the recognition of the experience of being at sea and the sense of the insignificance of the writer and the strong mixture of excitement and fear. Such engaged commentaries were able to interpret the nuances in this passage, for example, in the children’s relationship with their father. They also commented on the imagery in the passage and were able to engage with the techniques used. Other similar perceptive pieces focused on the detailed description of the father and the tension from the children as they were lowered into the sea.

Less focused responses tended to think the children were having a great time and that the father spent all his time acting out the role of his favourite hero and took his portrayal in a superficial way. In the same vein, similar levels of interpretation were less secure on the relationship between children and father. Any complexity or ambivalence of feeling caused problems.



- (b) The directed writing task provided a good opportunity for empathy, often allowing candidates to create a sense of the character of the father and recognise his complex relationships with the past/the sea/his children.

As a result, there were some fluent and effective interpretations of the father's views and some other excellent and perceptive writing about his character and personality, especially from those who had analysed his character in detail in (a). Indeed, many of the creative pieces were mature and sensitive with some poetic accounts of the father's relationship with the sea. Even less confident candidates succeeded in writing reasonably effective responses, albeit with less understanding of the father, but still with the ability to grasp the importance of the sea for him.

Question 3

- (a) This question produced some very good work and the passage proved to be accessible to all candidates. Perceptive answers, in particular, engaged with the role of technology and the lack of power of the human and recognised the underlying religious symbolism in the passage. Some candidates even showed genuine personal engagement, noting Forster's warning.

In the middle of the range, most candidates were able to recognise the isolation of the character and the dominance of the machine. These commentaries picked out the key features and clearly understood the whole tone and direction of the passage. Further down the range, there was usually sound understanding of the situation Vashti found herself in and the monotony of her days: stylistic features were conspicuous enough so that candidates were able to engage with them.

- (b) The directed writing was sometimes very impressive and imaginative. Better candidates were able to consider the character and her life and engaged with them effectively. They often showed perceptive recognition and personal engagement, using Forster's style creatively by adopting the repeated co-ordinating conjunctions; at the same time, they subtly changed the mood, showing Vashti's newly-awakening sense of emptiness. One or two even chose dreams of the surface/her son in interesting responses.

Slightly less engaged answers found it challenging either to develop the plot in any significant way or to control a feasible extension and scenario, yet even here there were no problems with reproducing the style. At the lower end of the range, some simply copied the original, some sent Vashti off into some kind of sub Mission Impossible style escape plan, which did not fit with the original and some decided that she would book her ticket to see her son straight away.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/21
Composition

Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent, as appropriate.

General comments

On the whole, the papers differentiated the range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very imaginative and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. There were some very successful, enjoyable and engaging whole scripts, and they displayed great skill in producing sophisticated and mature imaginative writing: indeed, there were some wonderful answers considering the time constraints within which they were produced. Also, such scripts displayed great skill and acumen in exploring argumentative or persuasive types of material, confirming the candidates' all round ability.

Other scripts exhibited greater security in one section than the other, producing rather uneven whole scripts as a result. At the lower end of the range, some responses were rather naive in terms of their subject, construction or exemplification. In the first section, candidates need to steer away from simple derivation of other sources – especially television and film narratives and characterisation. Technical errors relating to expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation were a matter of concern for some candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were some solid and efficient responses to the title: most candidates were able to bring out clear contrasts between the sections. The more successful answers portrayed the innocence and gauche mentality of the initiate with insight, and created a genuine sense of the classroom experience. The majority followed predictable lines, especially with regard to the teacher, contrasting initial enthusiasm with bitter disillusionment and boredom. One noticeable weakness was conveying a sense of motivation. Less secure answers tended to focus very much on narrative and rather simple, repetitive contrasts.

Question 2

There was a steady range of material here – the more engaging answers exploited the conventions of the genre with some confidence and style. There was a telling blend of descriptive and narrative elements in such responses. Most answers to this tended to be quite effective: clear focus and clear structure. A number of answers, however, were rather obvious in intent and outcome.

Question 3

There were a number of effective descriptive pieces which helped to create and sustain ideas of tension and suspense. Atmospheric qualities emerged in such answers without drifting into horror or murder mystery formats. However, many candidates found this difficult in terms of focus. They responded to 'tension' and 'suspense' without paying attention to the instruction to write descriptively. Sometimes 'mist' was never mentioned. There was far too much evidence of candidates re-cycling past exam questions such as the

forest, the tunnel and ghost town. The most favoured scenario was a chase/an escape, sweating, panting and, ultimately, a scene of murder and mayhem with optional zombies. Centres emphasise strongly to candidates the need to focus on effects of language, underpinned by a straight and convincing narrative idea.

Question 4

The best responses here were those where clear planning and foresight were in evidence. Situations and characters were established and these moved seamlessly towards the conclusion. However, too many answers seemed to tag on the quotation without enough sense of direction. Some candidates did not pay attention to the grammar of the given sentence, often losing the impact of the conclusion because the words just did not fit.

Question 5

There were some focused and very thoughtful compositions in response to the title; material ranged from an extremely liberal and inclusive approach to a strong argument for the prioritisation of national identity. Opinions were well-argued. It was pleasing to see candidates engaging with this topic with genuine passion.

Question 6

This title also provoked some carefully constructed and thoughtful responses which managed to create opposed arguments in a balanced fashion. Less secure answers tended to narrow down each case to one or two rather obvious arguments without offering development and exemplification. Voices often did not contrast sufficiently; few bothered with a proper letter layout or knew how to address the recipient and sign off the letter. Candidates should try to avoid slipping into a 'rant' as this is self-penalising: it does not produce writing which fulfils the criteria of the top bands, such as 'expression capable of complex argument.'

Question 7

This was tackled by a large number of candidates and was, on the whole, handled with real vigour and strength. Arguments were well handled, on the whole, though sometimes became too rambling, personal and unstructured. The incisive response usually fares better. Some candidates, whilst arguing strongly that cosmetic surgery did more harm than good, suddenly felt the need to offer some counter arguments to balance the case, tending to slightly undermine their initial approach.

Question 8

The most successful answers here kept the title fully in mind, offering practical advice and explanation in an appropriate register for the target audience. Some saw the question as an opportunity to offer advice about national economies and worldwide fiscal policies, which were not audience-appropriate. Engaging answers treated the audience as mature, thoughtful teenagers who lived and enjoyed life on a daily basis. They tapped into the audience's interests and priorities with skill.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There were some sound and solid answers. The more effective answers really created a strong sense of motivation and voice, whilst enabling sharply focused contrasts to emerge. They stressed specific examples of product details, which provided lively and often engaging insights into both character and motivation – especially concerning “top of the range” items which required extensive persuasion like cars or expensive perfume. Most candidates were able to distinguish the start and end of careers with illustrative contrasts, usually to show enthusiasm at the beginning and jaded cynicism at the end. Less secure answers seemed to drift into rather repetitive ideas without developing a further sense of character and personality. Weaker answers tended to use one long description of a career without much contrast, or a list of events without much recourse to analysis of character. First person accounts were generally more vivid.

Question 2

There were some very successful answers which clearly established a sense of the season so that it became a motivating factor in the sequence of events and development of characters: these were done with some finesse and imagination. Others did indeed convey a sense of mood and place, but did not appear to have a direct connection with the topic: just seeming to use the season as a tagged on device for any story at hand. Candidates read ‘tale’ in diverse ways – yet produced engaging and effective interpretations of the title.

Question 3

This was a popular choice and produced a range of response ranging from physical darkness, psychological darkness and mysterious stories from the past – secrets hanging over the present. One of the most effective

answers was set in a psychologist's office: the patient travelled from spiritual darkness to enlightenment. Many preferred to denote "darkness" as metaphorical, and included evil or very misguided characters in the situations, which was accepted as an effective approach if it remained within the "descriptive" parameters. Less successful responses tended to draw on elements of horror stories alone. The generally weak answers were based on a lot of simple linear narratives rather than descriptive pieces. Some contained merely lists of events rather than specifically tension-inducing or suspenseful situations; the usual few had a clichéd "it was all a dream" ending, although there were one or two very effective responses where the dream/nightmare related specifically to an accompanying or a parallel 'real-life' situation, and hence reflected (invariably catastrophically) on it. Alternatively, there were a lot of rather vague abstract angst-ridden cries of desolation without much description of what it was that was so dark. There was a lot of rather contrived wandering about in forests as well.

Question 4

The best responses here were those where clear planning and foresight were in evidence. Situations and characters were established and moved seamlessly towards the conclusion. Too many answers seemed to tag on the quotation without enough sense of direction. Competent answers often relied on the solving of a crime, with handy CCTV cameras or a technology obsessed protagonist. "Prediction" caused a few problems: perhaps some candidates were unaware of a precise enough definition; some played it safe with gypsy fortune-tellers and adults with an "I told you so, youngster" attitude.

Question 5

There was some provocative argument in responses to this title. Some writers felt that such a system of reward would motivate teachers and focus their attention: others believed that such a process would prove divisive and lead to a lack of people willing to join the profession. Strong responses were often either thoughtful about the perceived injustice of the statement and/or very specific about the economic implications to the teacher, school/college and society in general. Candidates were very careful not to name any of their own teachers and should be congratulated on their discretion. Some heartfelt material was produced which seemed to chime with writers' own experiences, both positive and not so positive. A lot of answers were balanced discussions often using personal experiences within a school or college environment to provide illuminating observations on the teacher-candidate relationship. A good number of answers were staunchly on the 'side' of the teachers, frequently pointing to the fact it simply was not fair that one teacher might lose out just because they had a few classes of lower-achieving, or disruptive, candidates. Weaker answers were rather unstructured and unplanned, though often with plenty of ideas rather randomly expressed; many candidates found it difficult to organise these points effectively.

Question 6

This was, on the whole, handled quite adroitly, especially where both sides of the argument were explored with some development and insight. There were issues of health considered and matters of age and wisdom also came into play. This was a good question for those candidates who needed a strong structural element as a starting point. The better responses usually reflected two very different "voices", often with an elderly person writing in to say the age should remain the same. There were a lot of very negative points about teenage driving, but also about the snail's pace of old people's cars. Some comments about the day-to-day lives of elderly people were very perceptive without detracting from the topic. These included discussions about health issues, caring for grandchildren and the necessary provision of goods and services (including a proper public transport system) for these citizens. Again, specificity reaped its own rewards. Letter formats were variable – especially the choices of opening and close.

Question 7

This was a very popular choice and elicited some very personal and persuasive responses, founded on strong arguments and exemplification. The overall opinion seemed to shift against the notion of beauty contests because of the perceived notions they apparently created. Candidates produced, at best, thought provoking answers about the kind of society which tolerated such practices and explored what such contests teach us about ourselves and the ways in which we consume the media in particular. For example, the "Toddlers and Tiaras" type of event brought out some perceptive comments about deluded and interfering parents who had probably been victims themselves and who were passing on the madness to their unsuspecting babies. Extensive discussions were offered about the perils of anorexia/bulimia, plastic surgery/Botox procedures and self-enforced dieting in general; many candidates commented on the perceived humiliation and bullying by the (obviously few) winners to the losers. There were many ironic allusions to beauties mouthing pieties about charities and 'world peace'. It was not all anti-pageant though;



many of the more successful candidates balanced their arguments by citing examples of those who had profited by their involvement, thereby fast-forwarding their careers in modelling, and in general their self-confidence.

Question 8

There were some steady and informed responses to this title and candidates produced solid and, in the main, edifying material which offered practical advice and guidance with a clear sense of balance and direction. Stronger answers got their audience right, by addressing their peers directly and in an organised way. 'Saving' was an obvious piece of good advice, but the better responses weaved this notion in with the perceived attitudes of the 'typical' teenager/parent relationship, often using a manipulative tone to convince the audience of the implicit guilt in splurging their allowance on luxury goods and spending their parents' hard-earned cash in frivolities. This was often successfully tempered with the good sense of keeping a rough account of what goes out and what comes in. Less successful answers drifted away from the topic at hand.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/23

Composition

Key messages

Candidates are reminded to pay particular attention to:

- engaging with all key words in a question;
- planning the development of their writing;
- avoiding predictable or derivative plots and ideas;
- using a tone appropriate to the type of writing specified by the question;
- checking that tenses used are correct and consistent, as appropriate.

General comments

On the whole, the papers differentiated the range of candidates successfully, with answers ranging from the very imaginative and thoughtful, to ones affected by significant lapses in technical accuracy. There were some very successful, enjoyable and engaging whole scripts, and they displayed great skill in producing sophisticated and mature imaginative writing: indeed, there were some wonderful answers considering the time constraints within which they were produced. Also, such scripts displayed great skill and acumen in exploring argumentative or persuasive types of material, confirming the candidates' all round ability.

Other scripts exhibited greater security in one section than the other, producing rather uneven whole scripts as a result. At the lower end of the range, some responses were rather naive in terms of their subject, construction or exemplification. In the first section, candidates need to steer away from simple derivation of other sources – especially television and film narratives and characterisation. Technical errors relating to expression, spelling, grammar and punctuation were a matter of concern for some candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

There was a good number of very engaging answers in response to this title. Some answers traced a relatively short career, for example recruitment, short war, demob. Such answers often provided sharp and clinical focus because the time span was foreshortened; hence the intensity of the experience was greater. Contrasts in motivation and outlook were covered well by most answers. Less successful answers neglected to contrast the two pieces, or did not really create a sense of character or motivation as the question asked.

Question 2

This was not a particularly popular question. Candidates who attempted this understood the genre of autobiography and were generally successful when they wrote about a short span of time (opening chapter) rather than a long list of life events.

Question 3

A number of answers were seen and they were proficient at one end and uneven at the other. The best material noted the need for descriptive elements rather than narrative and this insight helped to create some effective and atmospheric pieces. One particularly engaging answer described an atmospheric night-time game of hide-and-seek on a beach full of holiday-makers, with the light being a torchlight belonging to the 'seeker', which inspired tension and suspense for the hidden narrator.

Question 4

This seemed to encourage some steadily effective adventure or spy-type stories on the **one** hand. On the other, it also produced some carefully constructed answers which offered a twist in the tale. Careful planning was the key in addressing this question. Some less secure answers seemed to tag on the quotation with an insufficient sense of direction.

Question 5

A number of answers were seen and they were sensible and informed responses on the whole. Some argued that such activities took candidates away from studying or deprived them of the right to enjoy their teenage years: other responses believed that such voluntary work established good practice, compassion or at least civic-mindedness, and prepared people for life's challenges and future scenarios. Some answers had a tendency to be too discursive, lacking a clear argument. However, many candidates had clear opinions about these subjects which they expressed knowledgeably and persuasively.

Question 6

A few sensible and carefully structured answers were seen, with good contrasting perspectives regarding the voting age being lowered. Issues of maturity of today's youth, with their exposure to greater media information and education about politics were brought up rather persuasively, together with the fact that political decisions affect everybody, not just 'adults'.

Question 7

This was answered with sincerity and passion by a number of candidates and provoked strong and emotive arguments supported by a clear rationale. There were many candidates who saw such programmes as fodder creating robotic and uncritical vestiges of thought; there were those who argued such shows diminished the nature of the medium itself and took valuable time away from slots where genuine 'real' material could be covered. Others considered the effects not just on viewers but on the contestants themselves.

Question 8

There was a small variety of lively and engaging responses to this question. The answer was done well when focused appropriately on the teenage audience and the second person tense was used.