

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/11
Passages for Comment

Key Messages

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, blogs, advertisements and advertorials – so that they can assess not only the conventions and language associated with different formats and genres but also 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 subject, mood and tone. Candidates should be able to explore the contrasts and differences between the sections of a given extract; they need to move 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. Candidates also 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. A secure degree of technical accuracy – especially in the use of spellings, punctuation and tenses – is required at this level.

General Comments

The passages on the papers proved to be accessible and engaging allowing for a range of candidates to engage with the material. No set of questions seemed to dominate and there was a good spread of answers. All of the pieces appeared to challenge the learners appropriately. Similarly, all genres of writing seemed to be familiar to them and there were some good examples of diary entries, promotional language and the continuation of the narrative.

In terms of part (a) of the question, at the higher end of the range, there were some focused and perceptive answers which explored the effects and qualities conveyed by individual words and phrases with insight and skill. Such responses succeeded in offering a sustained overview and managed to relate the part to the whole in terms of structure and progression, whilst maintaining an awareness of mood and direction. For example, on paper 12 learners were able to detect the sustained inner conflict in the narrator's mind and how it was brought to a point of resolution. Answers in the middle of the range tended to offer analyses which grasped the development and purpose of different sections of the set extract, whilst offering some informed ideas about aspects of language and style: such comments need to be a little more sustained and slightly less partial in their approach. At the lower end of the range, some candidates used a standard approach/checklist which was then not followed by a more specific analysis: there was a tendency to rely on the identification of specific devices and techniques – some of which were not always in evidence. Often, the identification of such devices led to rather generalised comments which could be applied to any sample of material; comments need to be tailored to the context and nature of the extract under consideration. Learners should be aware that they are looking to comment on the effects rather than the content of language and that extended paragraphs on the purpose and audience of the extracts are not really necessary. The questions require learners to comment on the style and language primarily so that particular guesses about the suitability of readership can lead into rather general surmise.

Directed writing tasks produced a range of answers: from the very perceptive to the rather brief and confused. It is important to realise – when addressing a directed writing task based on the language and style of the original piece – that the set extract needs to be deconstructed first so that its features are appreciated and can be applied to other contexts. Some learners still resort to “borrowing” words and whole phrases from the set extract: this is a tendency that learners need to avoid because it limits the amount of marks which can be awarded for original and individual responses.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) This question was popular and learners had no problems recognising the genre and purpose of the extract. Nearly all learners grasped the purpose and tone of the advertisement as well. Many addressed it with gusto and a strong sense of purpose. Effective answers were able to see beneath the surface of the passage and to look at exactly who the advertisement was aimed at and the social implications of this, making comments on value, clientele and a luxurious lifestyle with some aplomb. The essential qualities of the writing were noted: listing, the frequent use of adjectives and generally elevated language, frequent addressing of the reader and the organisation of the second half of the advertisement into sections to highlight the Resort's many features. A useful point of differentiation between learners was how some were (or, became increasingly) sceptical about the claims made for the Resort, a few maintaining that the advertisement was a piece of "propaganda", and explored the language of the extract from that premise. Less secure responses tended to miss any angle of analysis and merely re-listed the hotel's amenities with an occasional comment on the language.
- (b) On the whole, this was tackled by most learners and many took to the complaints aspect of the question with enthusiasm. Effective pieces of writing took a balanced view and acknowledged that, while some aspects of the Resort were good, others were definitely not and made sensible suggestions as to how the poor service might be improved for future guests. There were other very effective responses where writers adopted personas registering their "dissatisfaction" in terms of disgruntlement to outright indignation: they reasoned that some of the claims made for the Resort could not (and indeed did not) bear up to the slightest scrutiny. Less focused answers tended to zoom in on one aspect of the original piece only (less convincing ones featured complaints ranging from surly staff to small beds to either over- or under-cooked food), creating a rather narrow and inflexible interpretation of the task and the material. Some candidates took the opportunity to rant for far longer than the stipulated number of words and this was not to their credit.

Question 2

- (a) The extract provided a lot of scope for learners to analyse figurative language in particular. There were some effective interpretations of the characters and the setting. The initial atmosphere – with its moments of suspense in the references to the 'moonless and leaf-surrounded night' and the bird 'crashing about' – was gauged well by a number of answers. The rather unconcerned response of the narrator also evoked interesting comments: the change in the her attitude, underpinned by her sense of weariness, allowed learners to comment on the progression of the extract. Its transition to more intense activity was noted by engaged responses. Less secure answers tended to offer a summary of the content of the passage whilst needing to develop more detailed and incisive comments on the effects created by individual words and phrases.
- (b) There were some competent responses to the task. Effective answers established the narrator's initial indifferent attitude and explored the contrasting moods of the original piece incisively. This was sometimes conveyed by the use of dialogue or by a careful selection of active verbs and telling adjectives. Answers lower down the range tended to list narrative and setting details and merely substitute a pig, horse, rabbit and so on for the cockerel – often with limited success in terms of invention and originality. It is important that answers do not simply borrow the same words and phrases from the set extract.

Question 3

- (a) At the top of the range, learners sensed that characteristics of travel writing were evident in the extract, with perhaps a sharper focus than is the norm on the personality of the writer. The nostalgic and rather confident tone of the opening was addressed with some precision in effective responses; the sense of freedom (both physical and mental) and regularity the writer felt in the sky were also understood in such responses. The sudden sense of contrast was also appreciated in the second half of the passage. Perceptive and informed commentaries noted the effects of particular aspects of figurative language and focused on the rather mysterious close of the extract with some precision. Less secure answers seemed to sense the general sense of opposing moods in the piece: they needed to develop rather more sustained and detailed comments on the aspects of language and style which created them.

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- (b) Some pieces created the sense of contrasting feelings and moods quite well and even of liberation combined with feelings of fear and insecurity.

Other answers tended to play rather safe and selected activities which were close to the ones in the original extract (paragliding, sky-diving and so on) when they really needed to create an appropriate setting of their own; many others had the writer overcome a phobia of water through various activities (such as scuba-diving or yachting). A number of learners needed to interpret “emotionally challenging activity” more widely other than just as another form of a stereotypical adrenaline-filled activity (a visit to a hospital ward was one of the more successful departures from a very narrow norm).

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/12

Passages for Comment

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General Comments

The passages on the papers proved to be accessible and engaging allowing for a range of candidates to engage with the material. No set of questions seemed to dominate and there was a good spread of answers. All of the pieces appeared to challenge the learners appropriately. Similarly, all genres of writing seemed to be familiar to them and there were some good examples of diary entries, promotional language and the continuation of the narrative.

In terms of part (a) of the question, at the higher end of the range, there were some focused and perceptive answers which explored the effects and qualities conveyed by individual words and phrases with insight and skill. Such responses succeeded in offering a sustained overview and managed to relate the part to the whole in terms of structure and progression, whilst maintaining an awareness of mood and direction. For example, on paper 12 learners were able to detect the sustained inner conflict in the narrator's mind and how it was brought to a point of resolution. Answers in the middle of the range tended to offer analyses which grasped the development and purpose of different sections of the set extract, whilst offering some informed ideas about aspects of language and style: such comments need to be a little more sustained and slightly less partial in their approach. At the lower end of the range, some candidates used a standard approach/checklist which was then not followed by a more specific analysis: there was a tendency to rely on the identification of specific devices and techniques – some of which were not always in evidence. Often, the identification of such matters led to rather generalised comments which could be applied to any sample of material; comments need to be tailored to the context and nature of the extract under consideration. Learners should be aware that they are looking to comment on the effects rather than the content of language and that extended paragraphs on the purpose and audience of the extracts are not really necessary. The questions require learners to comment on the style and language primarily so that particular guesses about the suitability of readership can lead into rather general surmise.

Directed writing tasks produced a range of answers: from the very perceptive to the rather brief and confused. It is important to realise – when addressing a directed writing task based on the language and style of the original piece – that the set extract needs to be deconstructed first so that its features are appreciated and can be applied to other contexts. Some learners still resort to “borrowing” words and whole phrases from the set extract: this is a tendency that learners need to avoid because it limits the amount of marks which can be awarded for original and individual responses.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) The extract proved to be accessible to learners and there were few problems in understanding vocabulary and the purpose of the passage. Perceptive answers distinguished between grandeur, uniqueness, elitism and exclusivity and, indeed, scepticism was expressed as to the validity of the claims made for the Club's facilities and service that showed some keen engagement with the overall tenor of the extract. Such answers also pointed out that it was likely to be an expensive holiday and that there would be hidden extras. Most learners were able to make relevant points (for example, many commented on the structure with the side headings and the effect of this). Less secure answers tended to paraphrase the passage or just repeat it in their own words. The problem seemed to be a matter of technique rather than understanding in many cases: rather than feature spot, responses need to ensure that they evaluate or comment on the effects of the techniques employed by the writer.
- (b) There were some very good pieces of writing expressing indignation with the lack of promised amenities and facilities: some detailed examples explaining why they were not satisfied were expressed with a relish for outrage in a suitably haughty style. Almost everyone understood the purpose of the task. It was clear that most learners enjoyed the task and were willing to introduce their own ideas and language.

Less secure answers contained letters of complaint, thereby having a different audience from that specified by the question. Answers consequently were not sufficiently focused on a range of dissatisfactions linked to the original passage. Their vocabularies conveyed various general disgusts without being specific.

Question 2

- (a) There were some perceptive and informed responses which explored how emotionally attached the writer was to each house he had lived in and the effect nature had on him. Exploring the interconnection between places also was examined. Some learners commented on how the house had its own force which was caught between the past and present/that the sun setting was a metaphor for the end of his time as a nomad/that the contrasts of colour (black and white) symbolised his transition of life from a nomad to settling down. Other such answers considered the accumulation of references to prisons and different times with some analytical appreciation. Variation of sentence structure was noted, mostly appropriately. These responses were sensitive to the reasons the writer had chosen this particular place against the obvious drawbacks and could comment on his quixotic attitudes to wherever he had lived. Others wrote convincingly about the effects of the language, acknowledging the beauty of the surroundings, the joy the writer experienced cycling around the countryside and his growing contentment and, in addition, wrote movingly about his feelings.

In less effective answers there was some tendency to view the opening as gothic (not ever identified as such) whilst needing to appreciate the potential the writer saw in the property and his gradual appreciation of its setting. Some responses tried to turn the extract into a gloom-laden tale or even a horror story. There was lots of "fear" and "horror" detected in what is really rather a low-key extract which may be ambiguous but certainly not deeply unhappy. Such answers needed to develop points on the writer's psyche in more depth.

- (b) A number wrote extremely well in this section, often writing lyrically about the beauties of their own countries but well aware of the drawbacks – pollution, overcrowding, poverty – but offset by the geographical positives – mostly better weather. Effective writing also picked up on items from the original passage, such as the large quantity of books, and included them neatly into their own writing, managing to catch the writer's voice. They were able to use personal regional knowledge and atmosphere while reproducing the style and language of the original as required in the question. There was some very pleasing capturing of the ambiguity of recognition of home in unpromising locations.

At the lower end of the range, answers followed the passage slavishly, often using phrases or whole sentences to augment their own writing. Some descriptions of the house were limited in comparison to the surroundings, perhaps because candidates had more confidence in this area. Others wrote general answers which described being either happy or sad in a new home. A very

few learners missed the instruction that their writing should be set in their own country, and the writer of the passage in a place the learners did not seem to know much about.

Question 3

- (a) This was another popular question and proved to be a passage that was appreciated at many levels of achievement, from those who concentrated on the physical to those able to move between physical, psychological and spiritual aspects. It enabled perceptive writers to get into the character of the narrator and handle the nuances of his motives, the scene back in Manhattan and the relationship with Rodney Cutler. These learners also wrote well on the use of language and were able to analyse the writer's progression of feelings through the passage. They also managed to untangle the writer's actual age, his expectations of himself in the present and the age he must present to fellow climbers without complication. In fact, most learners were able to engage with this passage especially the beginning. Again most picked out the humour of the description of the granddad and the comparison between the writer and Rodney, along with the changing tones.

At the lower end of the range, there needed to be understanding that the writer was, as yet, not an old man, nor indeed, a child at a football game. One or two thought the writer was on a kind of office bonding hike up Kilimanjaro and must have done some training by running up and down the stairs in the Manhattan office block as it was 21 stories above ground level. There were some who made limited comments on the writer, his personality or his reasons for doing the climb but looked only at the language whilst needing to explain the effect language might have on the reader. Others spent too much time on the relationship between Rodney and the writer and came from opposite ends of the spectrum – some felt the writer hated Rodney because he felt belittled by him while others said the writer admired Rodney and was striving to be like him.

- (b) This produced a wide variety of responses, with many writing about competitive sporting achievements against poor Rodney in which the narrator got his own back: others adopted the same tone as the passage with Rodney way out in front of the pack in whatever sport the learner chose. There were plenty of marathons through the Sahara, much white water rafting, some canoeing over huge expanses of water, many swimmers undertaking vast distances, with a mixture of success and failure. Effective answers picked up on the character building aspects of challenging oneself while others kept to the 'why am I doing this?' attitude with no specific answer. Most learners were able to write successfully about the physical discomforts in imitation of the passage with one or two using an appropriate style of phrasing and vocabulary. The passage enabled many learners to demonstrate their use of English idioms successfully and to inject the same kind of underlying humour as found in the passage. Many learners engaged very successfully with this question and most managed to have a good stab at it.

Perhaps some choices of activity were more appropriate than others but most got the sense of the challenge to motivation and morale as well as physical effort and endurance. At the lower end of the range, some problems arose for those who chose to continue to write about climbing.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/13
Passages for Comment

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General Comments

The passages on the papers proved to be accessible and engaging allowing for a range of candidates to engage with the material. No set of questions seemed to dominate and there was a good spread of answers. All of the pieces appeared to challenge the learners appropriately. Similarly, all genres of writing seemed to be familiar to them and there were some good examples of diary entries, promotional language and the continuation of the narrative.

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Directed writing tasks produced a range of answers: from the very perceptive to the rather brief and confused. It is important to realise – when addressing a directed writing task based on the language and style of the original piece – that the set extract needs to be deconstructed first so that its features are appreciated and can be applied to other contexts. Some learners still resort to “borrowing” words and whole phrases from the set extract: this is a tendency that learners need to avoid because it limits the amount of marks which can be awarded for original and individual responses.

Comments on Specific Questions

Question 1

- (a) A good number of learners were able to comment successfully on the language employed in the passage and how it was used to create specific effects and qualities. There was some secure understanding of the extract's attempt to produce a sense of a high quality product supported by both modern and traditional elements. There was a degree of awareness of the likely target audience for the promotion and the cultural delights on display. Perceptive answers commented on the evocative qualities of individual words and phrases and the selection of indigenous language to describe the location and its contents.

Answers at the lower end of the range responses tended to offer rather general comments on the content of the extract whilst needing to engage with the qualities and effects conveyed by individual words and phrases in greater depth. Other answers in this range tended to get stuck repeating one particular idea or point, citing numerous examples to support it, or commented mainly on how the passage fulfilled its purpose to persuade and gave a rather superficial description of layout and design.

- (b) There were some excellent answers, emulating the style of the passage and incorporating features of their own country successfully. Such responses contained imaginative use of language and used large amounts of detail in their writing: colours, senses and local architecture. Many answers took the opportunity to use local knowledge, with no holds barred. The style of the original extract was reproduced almost instinctively in such writing. Learners understood the appeals to privacy, the beauty of the location and the quality of facilities.

Responses lower down the range tended to rely too much on material from the original passage rather than reflecting the aspects of another country, like their own. They were able to pick up the language but needed to use it in a more imaginative and creative way.

Question 2

- (a) Many learners clearly enjoyed this passage. Most were able to comment on the structure of the piece, how the writer had changed whilst living there and the part nature played. Some were able to make good use of the potential for discussing figurative language in the first paragraph in particular. There was some perceptive teasing out of language choice implications for the relationship between man and nature (familial/ communicative). In the middle part of the range there was a tendency to cherry pick examples of language use which sometimes led to a rather erratic sense of the progression of the piece.

At the lower end of the range, there was considerable confusion over the chronology of the passage, with some even talking about the writer's childhood home. Such answers needed to get past the immediate sense of greyness: others went to town on the love for nature. In this range the diary entries required a little more detailed consideration, as well as the narrator's move to the city.

- (b) There were some excellent and perceptive responses here as the question allowed learners to answer in their own voice. Most responses seemed to capture the boredom and general teenage negativity quite realistically. Many were convincing as diary entries and written in an appropriate style. The best were able to add touches of humour related to birds/ foraging. Indeed, most answers revealed an understanding of purpose and contained pieces that showed a grumpy and disaffected young girl/woman, unhappy with her environment, and a few enhanced their answers by offering some sympathetic comments about the father and gave a wider balance. Learners clearly understood the isolation of the cottage and how it might affect them living there (lack of Internet and mobile signal). Some were even able to subtly tease themselves with references to over-dependence on technology. Others were able to include how the father interacted with nature and how annoying this was. Overall, the directed writing was often freshly personal.

Question 3

- (a) This really provoked a range of responses. Most picked up quickly the underlying approach of the writer in his description of Neverland and Elizabeth Taylor, with some very fine responses to the nuances of the language, including comments on the idiosyncrasies of the park along with aspects of the descriptive sections.

A number of perceptive answers made intelligent sense of the elegiac tone and were able to track topic movement and to consider tone whilst clarifying the attitude of the writer. There was some productive focus on figurative language in isolation and better answers built up an interpretation based on the interaction of these figurative themes (fantasy/reality, threat/pleasure, alive/dead).

Less secure responses found the whole experience described in the extract all rather wonderful and even justified the comments about the animals as reflecting Michael Jackson's love of nature. Others brought their own feelings about him into play and wrote in response to them rather than the material actually in the passage.

- (b) This was done well on the whole. Effective answers described more of the park and added more conversations with Elizabeth Taylor. At best, there were some excellent examples in response to the set task, clearly following the voice of the original, with some withering attacks on both the place and Elizabeth Taylor. Less secure pieces of writing tended to re-describe the passage, whilst others needed to offer fewer generalizations: a few even managed to justify how wonderful Michael Jackson was to have created this fabulous place for all the sick children. At the lower end of the range there were some bland accounts which needed to pick up on the nuances of the passage in greater detail.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/21
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue. With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(All Alone)

This was a very popular question, though responses were of varied quality. There were a good number of well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was taken, with many candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Ideas focused on times of isolation in childhood or beginning new experiences, such as starting School or moving to a new location. Less effective responses tended to drift into thought processes or into incidents of bullying supported by excessive use of dialogue. Weaker answers were not sharply focused on the theme; 'character' was usually more developed than 'place'. Some candidates ignored the 'novel' notation and wrote stories which had endings. Sometimes, the link to the question was often not revealed until the end, after a long and rambling plot.

Question 2

(Life on the Road)

There were very few answers on this question. Candidates who attempted this seemed to have some difficulty with it, apparently confused by the title, and struggling with the concept. Some wrote two disconnected pieces, or pieces by separate narrators. Scenarios were therefore unconvincing and, overall, expression lacked quality and conviction because of the limited understanding.

Question 3

(Landscape – Morning)

This was a popular choice and produced a good range of descriptive writing and convincing responses, most of which clearly understood the expectations of the title. There were some very engaging and enjoyable compositions, especially where candidates built up detailed and sustained descriptive ideas without drifting into narrative. Sometimes, however, language effects seemed forced, with loosely controlled punctuation. There was sometimes an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. There was also quite a degree of tense-shifting. Weaker answers drifted into narrative or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with either landscape or morning.

Question 4

(Valuable Painting)

This was not a popular question, but where attempted responses mostly showed a strong voice and a clear sense of contrast and motivation. The links between the two pieces were well-considered. Some were excellent pieces, often with stunningly vicious characterisation! The question produced some of the best answers the Examiners had come across, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts, drawing out other tensions between the contestants, adding historical context and background in the process. At the lower end, responses were not very convincing and suffered from weak expression.

Section B

Question 5

(Live for Today)

This was a popular question with a wide range of approaches. Most answers were focused and balanced, with the better responses widening the topic beyond the individual. Some strong candidates argued well even if from only one point of view, taking a personal stance all the way through the composition. Weaker answers tended to ramble on and lose focus, lacking the expressive ability to handle this kind of conceptual question. Some of these responses became repetitive and unvaried, drawing on clichés and generalised observations.

Question 6

(Do not Get Me Started)

This was not a popular question but where attempted usually grasped the style and tone needed. The responses were of varying quality, but there were some interesting targets. The best responses offered a strong voice and relevant examples. There were a number of weak answers, where the breadth of the question seemed to make it more difficult for candidates to focus their ideas.

Question 7

(Media and Privacy)

This was a popular question with some Centres and one which brought out a wide range of opinion. Most responses depended on the culture of the candidate as to the direction they took. There were some detailed arguments supported by examples of contemporary incidents and personalities, ranging from media celebrities to politicians in the candidates' home countries. Most answers offered a focused argument but only a few were done with sophistication. Strong candidates saw the complexity of possible responses while weaker responses went for a simplistic yes / no answer. The better ones had clear examples and did not neglect to use persuasive devices to convince.

Question 8

(Hobbies)

This was quite a popular question and responses were relevant, offering appropriate examples. There was some strong personal engagement with the topic, underpinned by a reasoned and relevant sense of audience and the approach entailed in the format. Effective answers adopted a mood of logical enthusiasm and compared life without and with recreational pursuits in a constructive and focused manner. However, weaker answers were a little pedestrian. A number missed the focus of the question, not always grasping the magazine article style. These failed to speak directly to the teenage audience via an article, writing often in the third person or talking about teenagers as if they were not the readers. Some simply described their own hobbies.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/22
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue. With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(Lost in the Crowd)

This was a very popular choice, but the quality of answers varied widely. There were many well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was seen, with the vast number of candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Large numbers responded with tales of festivals or large scale music events and markets. A few saw the potential for a more imaginative interpretation of the title: writing as an outsider, having no sense of identity, and so produced quite moving stories; or of committing a crime and disappearing into the crowds afterwards, leaving some kind of tense cliffhanger at the end. However, there were quite a number of responses where the link to the theme was tenuous, and also a number of dull first-person accounts about becoming separated from parents at some crowded venue, which were most unconvincing as opening chapters for a novel and often lacked any clear narrative control. Weaker responses ignored the ‘novel’ notation and wrote stories which had endings.

Question 2

(Twenty-four hours)

This was a moderately popular choice. It gave scope for a wide range of short stories. Some responses tended to be uneven in the wordage they gave to the respective episodes. Responses varied quite widely in quality. There were a few good answers but it was surprising how many candidates did not understand the concept of twenty-four hours. Many wrote two separate incidents or wrote the same incident but from different points of view. The effect was the two episodes did not hang together well or lacked any truly contrasting elements. Many limited the narrative effect by slow detailed description of a morning routine which had little relevance to the rest of the story. Others wrote in the third person. The best answers were those which contrasted location and pace, as well as personal emotion – drawing a clear sense of positive and negative scenes with some skill and imagination. Less effective answers tended to make the negative aspect too melodramatic – a sudden family tragedy, for example.

Question 3

(A Country Scene in the Evening)

Not as popular a choice as the first two questions. A number of candidates attempted appropriate linguistic features but sometimes this was overdone and the effect seemed forced, often at the expense of appropriate punctuation. There was also sometimes an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. Tense-switching was also a negative feature of some responses. Weaker answers drifted into narrative or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with either landscape or morning. There was still a good range of descriptive writing though, and most candidates clearly understood the expectations of the title. The top end answers were very well written indeed, with a sometimes impressive range of vocabulary and language effects, painting a visual landscape in great depth. Individual details and contrasts were evoked with aplomb.

Question 4

(Property Dispute)

This was a moderately popular choice. Some of the responses to this title were very good, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts. Some excellent pieces came up with stunningly vicious characterisation. There were some very cantankerous relatives on display, unaware of any obligations or unable to evaluate a wider sense of responsibility. The question, though not the most popular, produced some of the best answers the Examiners had come across. Candidates from some Centres were particularly effective with this question, where issues of race were sensitively handled; often claimants were trying to restore ancestral homelands. The less successful answers allowed the narrators to resort to too much narrative or professions of outrage.

Section B

Question 5

(The Law)

The quality of responses to this question varied quite widely. The best answers offered balance, good examples and a developed argument. Weaker candidates were more diffuse in their responses with answers that tended to be generalised and lacking development. Other weak answers went on at some length about the importance to society of having laws in place without relating this directly to the question of people obeying legislation, nor of circumstances in which it might be permissible to bend the law, or corruption. One candidate used this question to write about School uniforms without any convincing relation to the question. The most successful responses were those which argued that there are situations when it is more moral to disobey the law – when the law restricts human or civil rights etc. The best answer took a historical perspective and cited the way in which American citizens threw tea into Boston harbour to rebel against the tax laws, moving through to Hitler and Stalin and how it is right to disobey totalitarian laws which persecute minorities.

Question 6

(Holiday Guide)

This was popular with candidates. This was generally answered with a suitably grumpy tone and many candidates appeared familiar with the kind of article that was being suggested. Most candidates managed to offer a humorous voice and appropriate content. The more able candidates found scope for lively articles, some of them quite amusing and using appropriate rhetorical language; less able answers struggled to find many points to make or to develop those points they had made. It was obvious when candidates were not really familiar with this kind of writing – they struggled with the concept of grumpiness. Of those who did focus on the title, many wrote about Christmas alone, on the assumption that ‘holiday’ equates to Christmas. However, strong candidates gave some splendidly vitriolic responses to horrendous family holidays.

Question 7

(Multi-national Companies)

Generally the strongest responses in **Section B** were to this question, as quite a few candidates in developing countries seemed to be quite knowledgeable about the subject. A good range of arguments, many of which were well developed: a question which gave a clear advantage to candidates of Economics, Geography or Business Studies. Candidates were often able to offer structured and coherent responses. Some candidates were let down by weak expression and/or technical errors but content was often well-focused. Many strongly argued with clear understanding of the double-edged sword which multi-national companies bring. Less successful answers neglected to use persuasive techniques to convince, relying only on the knowledge alone to formulate responses to the question.

Question 8

(Retirement)

This was a moderately popular choice and there were a number of well-focused responses which showed great insight into what one might do in retirement. Answers were usually well-structured and coherent. There were some very well balanced pieces and Examiners enjoyed a few non-condescending, lively responses to this question. But there were some highly patronising pieces which effectively patted the elderly on the head and told them to go away and play. Many wrote a straightforward guide, giving suitable suggestions for activities to pursue and ways to maintain health and fitness. Better candidates saw the value in older people, encouraging them to balance community involvement with personal enjoyment. Those who took notice of the fact that they were supposed to be writing a magazine article for older readers tackled this well.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8693/23
Composition

Key Messages

A differentiated range of achievement was seen in this component. There were, as usual, some informed and occasionally outstanding pieces of work. At the top end of the range, candidates produced highly fluent and engaging responses in the imaginative writing section; in the discursive and argumentative writing section, there were some very tightly controlled answers, supported by an exploration of complex ideas and informed exemplification. These compositions instilled not only feelings of engagement but appreciation of what learners could achieve within the time limit. Answers in the middle of the range were often secure and offered some focused and purposeful creative writing, along with clear and consistent interpretations of discursive titles, but were marked by inconsistency in terms of technical expression and accuracy. Lower down the range, responses tended to be lacking in development or drifted into rather derivative or naïve approaches; some were affected by inappropriate levels of fluency and accuracy. They needed to be planned and structured more effectively with greater narrative / descriptive control. Argumentative writing needed to be shaped more effectively and developed in terms of detail and depth.

General Comments

Candidates need to ensure that they address inconsistent tenses – though this issue seems to be better this session than the last. Spending some time checking through the compositions for inconsistent tenses (as well as other technical errors) goes a long way towards a better mark. While paragraphing has generally improved, candidates need to remember to paragraph when using dialogue.

With regard to length, some of the responses to **Section B** were very short; these answers were self-penalising, as short work is often under-developed and lacking in convincing detail. Sometimes, candidates whose work was short had wasted time writing a first draft then rewriting a neat copy. While there is no need for full drafts, candidates who wrote a brief plan often succeeded in giving more structured responses. Still on the subject of length, it was obvious that some candidates had spent too much time on one section at the expense of the other: this was seen in some long, rambling responses for **Section A** and alarmingly short answers for **Section B**.

Comments on Specific Questions

Section A

Question 1

(Starting Again)

This was a popular question, though responses were of varied quality. There were a fair number of well-constructed answers with a clear understanding of the need to balance narrative line with the creation of character and place. A wide range of approaches was taken, with many candidates making good use of their imagination to stay within the bounds of expectation. Responses focused on beginning life at a new School or possibly getting involved in a new relationship. Weaker answers were not sharply focused on the theme; 'character' was usually more developed than 'place'. Some candidates ignored the 'novel' notation and wrote stories which had endings. Sometimes, the link to the question was often not revealed until the end, after a long and rambling plot.

Question 2

(The Factory)

This was a moderately popular question. There were some very sound responses here, which implied that candidates had good knowledge of the realities of redundancy and sudden closures. There was some effective writing and characterisation even within the limits indicated – contrasts of before and after were nicely developed and opposed. Some pleasing answers brought out the changed personalities of those involved in the ownership of the factories in subtle ways. However, a number of answers tended to be rather unvaried, without much narrative interest or descriptive contrast: adopting the positive and then the mirror image approach ('there was a gleaming machine' / 'there was not a gleaming machine'). Some candidates offered two separate, two disconnected pieces, ignoring the specific wording of the question.

Question 3

(Midnight)

This produced a good range of descriptive writing and convincing responses, most of which clearly understood the expectations of the title. The genre based possibilities of mystery and suspense were in evidence, and predictably, there were ghost/horror stories set in graveyards or creepy houses; or kidnappings in alleyways at night. However, other answers looked at the title from an unusual angle – such as the romantic tryst of a teenage couple in an isolated landscape. Generally, though, even the narratives managed descriptive effects. Some fine descriptive writing was seen at the top end, creating very evocative/imaginative descriptions which avoided merely listing imagery. At the lower end language effects seemed forced, with an over-use of sentence fragments – which ultimately limited their effect. Candidates should use sentence fragments only sparingly, for effect. Punctuation was loosely controlled and there was quite a degree of tense-shifting. Weaker answers drifted into narrative solely or simply wrote stories only loosely connected with a midnight scene.

Question 4

(Two soldiers)

Not many candidates attempted this question. However, some of the responses to this title were very good, showing a genuine sense of character, creating contrasting motivations and personalities, and convincing situations. The best candidates demonstrated a strong voice and provided cohesive narrative links between the two parts. Some excellent pieces came up with a strong structure and powerful characterisation.

Section B

Question 5

(Space Exploration)

This was a popular question, and in the main, the efforts seen were sound, with some strong opinions. There was an analysis of why space exploration is important generally, as well as the cost implications. Better candidates had a clear understanding of the limitations, particularly financial, of any national involvement. There was a lot of interesting speculation about the worthwhile nature (or not) of trying to locate either Earth-like planets to colonise, or trying to link up with alien civilisations. There were some very strong advocates of space research and their approach was to offer strong exemplification and a focus on the future of the world itself. Weaker answers tended to drift around in terms of rockets and interplanetary development. There were mix-ups about Neil Armstrong's place in culture (no other astronaut names were mentioned); use of definite article "the outer space"; basic misunderstandings about how much money is spent – and very repetitive answers generally.

Question 6

(Grumpy Guide to Sport)

This was a moderately popular choice and elicited a number of engaging and thoughtful answers. Responses showed a suitable sense of voice and audience. There were quite a few entertaining and lively offerings – written with a witty tone and interesting examples to illustrate their points. It was enjoyable to see those with non-sporting interests offer their view on the subject. There were occasional responses where the

angle seemed to be one of vehement outpouring at years of frustration: others adopted a more reasoned attitude and gave the reader humorous and ironic insights from their own perspective.

Question 7

(Governments – Fairness and Morality)

A popular question, this provoked some lively and thoughtful ideas. Most answers showed informed awareness of modern examples, drawing in events from the international and domestic stage to expound their ideas. But some candidates found this tricky, as there was a tendency to drift into cases of the moral and financial sins of individual politicians, rather than the actions of governments. Some candidates managed to see the difference, writing thoughtfully on governments' decisions to go to war, for example, and human rights abuses. The key phrase is 'we should not expect...' and this potentially opened up the question of what our expectations of governments should be, and why. A number argued governments were so corrupt that there was no point expecting fair treatment. Others took the view that fairness and morality were signs of weakness and that no sensible government would be fair as that would be bad for the country. Better answers produced well-structured and rounded responses and had concrete examples. Less secure compositions seemed to offer a number of examples which were not drawn into a cohesive line of thought and direction.

Question 8

(School Brochure)

This was a very popular question. There was a wide range of responses from some excellent and thoughtful, to some which simply threw in everything technical and whizzy and hoped that that would do. A surprising number spent ages talking about swimming pools and computers but failed to mention teachers. Most, though, adopted the requisite style and approach of such a brochure, employing the kinds of persuasive language that such institutions might use in the act of self-promotion. Effective answers also drew on structure and offered a range of reasons in a voice meant to charm and entice.