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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

GCE Ordinary Level

Paper 1127/01

Composition

General comments

This was the second year of examination and assessment of candidates in the revised GCE O Level Syllabus 1127. There was a considerable increase in the size of the entry and it was clear that teachers and candidates had benefited from the experience and practice afforded by last year's inaugural examination of the revised format. The candidates tackled this paper purposefully and confidently, making a determined effort to demonstrate their linguistic and thinking skills to impress and interest the Examiners, with considerable success. The paper offered a range of topics with ample opportunity for candidates to use their abilities to advantage and candidates responded well to familiar or imaginative situations or to thought-provoking tasks. Although a narrative approach to **Questions 2** and **5** proved the most popular choice, especially for weaker candidates, many of the more able linguists rose to the challenge of the discursive topics of **Questions 1** and **4**, the vivid descriptive style needed for **Question 3** and the difficulties of explaining abstract concepts in a deeper more analytical approach to **Question 5**. They produced some outstanding responses on these topics. It was very pleasing to see that no question was noticeably avoided this year. The range of questions promoted relevant responses and afforded differentiation between candidates across the ability range.

The choice of essay question was fairly evenly balanced this year, with evidence of relative popularity more easily seen within Centres than across the range. In some Centres, **Questions 1, 4** or **5** were by far the most frequently chosen, and the preparation and practice undertaken in the Centre on the subject of education, careers or the institution of marriage were clearly visible in the similar points made and vocabulary used by candidates from that Centre. **Question 3** also offered candidates the chance of responding to a very familiar topic with an 'inbuilt' structure presented in the wording of the question, which gave confidence, particularly to weaker candidates. Examiners were impressed by the linguistic accuracy and the assured and fluent prose style that derived from the effective use of the wide range of vocabulary, expression and idiom seen in the scripts. The candidates had been well taught, soundly prepared and were mature in attitude and approach. Essays were well planned and carefully structured according to chronology or logical development, although some candidates lost control of the argument or weakened the impact of the narrative by a banal or inaccurate final paragraph. Candidates should remember that this is what the Examiner reads immediately before awarding a mark, so a strong finish is important!

In **Section 2**, most candidates followed the advice to take time to read the given material with care and understanding and to 'think themselves into the scenario' before planning and writing their responses. It was, however, a little disappointing that so many candidates did not fully understand the requirements and presented the speech in partial or full letter format. In the speech, many suggested that their choice was the course that would take place, rather than trying to persuade their classmates to opt for it in a decision to be made by the whole class. Nevertheless, good performances in **Section 2** often lifted the final grades.

There were variations between Centres, as might be expected, but the overall standard of work produced by the candidates was impressive, with a great deal of thoroughly competent, good work, some outstanding, original and effective writing and relatively few weak candidates whose work was so poor that meaning was in doubt or linguistic error overwhelming.

There were hardly any misinterpretations of the rubric; candidates had used their time wisely and most were able to complete both parts of the paper at more than adequate length and evidently had time to check and correct their work if necessary. However, length and correction are matters giving rise to considerable concern:

- A word limit is suggested at the head of both **Section 1** and **Section 2**. Although the two sections carry equal weight and mark values, the assessment objectives vary considerably, as do the tasks and consequently, the word limits. However, a considerable number of candidates wrote far too much, frequently more than 1000 words in **Section 1**, which is far more than is needed to show sustained linguistic ability and suggests that the extra time allowed in the revised syllabus for reading, thinking and planning in **Section 2**, has simply been used for extended writing at the risk of losing both accuracy and the reader's interest. In the free writing of **Section 1**, candidates are expected to express their creative ideas or reasoned opinions in compositions of greater length than is required in the specified formats and particular tasks of the situational writing of **Section 2**. Indeed, excessive length can be positively unsuitable for letters, reports or, in this case, speeches, where audience attention must be caught, held and directed to the matter in hand, in crisp, concise, succinct style, not lost in rambling repetition or irrelevant digression which will fail to clarify, convince or persuade. However, some candidates wrote at even greater length for **Section 2** than for **Section 1** this year, determined to mention every item of the given information, even to the extent of 'lifting' the words and phrases straight from the paper without any attempt at adaptation or integration into the case being made for the preference of one vacation course over the others. Candidates must understand that the information on the paper is there to be *used* in support of the argument when appropriate, not copied or used negatively. It is also important to remember that quantity is not synonymous with quality. Excessive length can be counter-productive in both sections of the paper in that it provides greater opportunity for error and repetition, neither of which enhances the quality of the composition.
- It should be remembered that the instructions to candidates on the paper also state that the use of correcting fluid is not allowed. Errors should be crossed out neatly and the correct word inserted above, to maintain legibility. However, Examiners reported an increased use of such fluid or of untidy crossing out and failure to insert the corrected words in the correct places, marring the fluency of communication. Singaporean scripts are renowned for their neatness of presentation and legibility but handwriting seemed to be more microscopic than ever this year, with as many as 25 words on a line and considerable strain on an Examiner's eye-sight and patience!

The practice of including memorised 'impressive' phrases, or passages from essays written in preparation for the examination was particularly noted in the opening paragraphs of the narratives in **Questions 2** and **5**, where the accident or wedding ceremony was prefaced with over-written description of the weather or dawn on 'the fateful day'.

Where language errors were found they were predominantly those of tense or verb formation, inconsistency of tense sequence, subject/verb number agreement or the use of 'would' or 'could' when the conditional was unnecessary or actually wrong. Difficulty with tenses was particularly evident in narrative essays when the candidate began in the present then moved to a flash-back or reminiscence but found it hard to relate the event in the past tense and return to the present at the end of the story for reflection on the event recalled. The use of conjunctions also caused difficulty, as far too often a sentence appeared to have finished with a full stop, only for the next 'sentence' to begin with 'And...', 'But...', or 'So....'. There was an increasing tendency to use 'Hence', 'Thus', 'Therefore' and particularly 'As such' or 'Whereby' as sentence openings, implying support for an argument that had not been made. There were also many examples of tautology, particularly in **Section 2**: the inevitable 'Although...but...'; 'My fellow classmates...'; 'Personally I think...'; 'In my opinion I believe that for me...'.

On the other hand, it was pleasing to note that the use of 'texting' language and the more extreme forms of teenage or media slang seems to have been eliminated, as candidates have heeded the warning that such terms are not appropriate in the context of the examination. It was also heartening to see that even the weaker candidates had largely grasped the paragraphing, if not the full punctuation, of direct speech, so that Examiners had no need to puzzle out which character was speaking in the many conversations that enlivened the narratives.

In fact, despite the criticisms, the overall quality of the scripts presented in this examination was very pleasing indeed. Compositions were cohesive, carefully planned and paragraphed and written with personal engagement, original ideas and humour that sought successfully to interest, inform and entertain the reader.

Comments on specific questions**Section 1****Question 1**

'Parents and teachers are partners in the education of children.' In what ways can parents and teachers contribute to the education of children?

This was not a very popular choice overall but there were some Centres where it was very popular indeed, presumably reflecting the fact that this familiar topic had been the focus of discussion and practice in preparation for the examination, as the vocabulary and ideas were similar in many of the scripts.

Many began with a definition of education and reference to its importance and influence in adult life. Most candidates presented balanced answers, although weaker candidates found the material difficult to organise and dealt with the roles of parents and teachers separately with little evidence of any real focus on partnership. Parents were seen to contribute moral values and good manners, teachers to reinforce these and add academic knowledge in the school environment. Parental duties included 'social and moral education', helping with homework, sponsoring tuition and promoting good health. Teachers' responsibilities were preparation of pupils for examination success, 'inculcating' knowledge and discipline, and informing parents of progress, misdemeanours and unsuitable friendships. Both parents and teachers were deemed to have the responsibility to act as role models to their offspring and pupils.

The subject was accessible to all and the best candidates showed considerable maturity in understanding the benefits of the partnership and the work of parent/teacher groups, with clear responses based on their own reflections and personal experience. Unfortunately, there were far more answers that were formulaic and repetitive in both style and content, with predictable, unimaginative responses containing frequent repetition of the phrases of the question: 'parents and teachers' and 'education of children'. Candidates often became confused about number agreement and pronoun consistency: 'Parents teach their child that they must ...'; causing ambiguity for the reader.

Question 2

Write about how a serious accident led to an area being made safer for those who work or live there.

This was a very popular question, perhaps because it offered the only immediately obvious opportunity to write a narrative. Many candidates concentrated on the account of the accident, leaving the consequent safety measures and improvements to the area to be glossed over quickly or added in the final paragraphs almost as an afterthought. However, there were very few who failed to touch at all upon the second element of the task, and the best candidates gave well balanced narratives, many drawing on local knowledge and personal experience of real happenings, as seen in the many accounts of the collapse of the construction site 'at the Nicoll Highway'. Slippery surfaces, litter obstructing corridors and void-decks, falling flowerpots and window frames from HDB apartments also featured frequently. Many compositions dealt with road accidents, fires or pollution but there were also some situations that might be termed 'incidents' rather than 'accidents', such as earthquakes, terrorism, arson, vandalism, physical violence or even murder (the arrest of the murderer being the measure that made the area safer in this case!). It was obvious that some candidates enjoyed the experience of writing colourful accounts of gruesome scenes, but the most effective avoided the extremes of melodrama and made use of a wide and precise range of vocabulary to produce well planned and well balanced narratives, sometimes adding the suspense of the 'accident waiting to happen', when residents' pleas to the local authority, 'The Straits Times', or even in television interviews went unheeded until disaster struck. Likewise, road junctions with limited visibility, lack of traffic lights and no overhead bridge for 'pedestrains' (sic) made crossing the road hazardous and 'jay-walking' frequently led to serious injury or death. Safety measures were often initiated by pressure on the government and when provided were fully described and evaluated, making a suitable conclusion to the story.

Linguistic difficulties associated with this question included errors in tense sequence as candidates moved between past and present and problems with prepositions (one car 'hit on', 'hit at', 'hit to' another car). There was also frequent repetition of the phrase 'for those who live and work in the area' in some of the weaker scripts. Some candidates failed to strike the right balance in their compositions, taking too long to get to the account of the accident following details of the narrator waking up, eating breakfast, preparing for school and observing poetically described but irrelevant weather conditions. Nevertheless, some Examiners reported that the best work of all was found in responses to this topic.

Question 3

It is not only shopping that brings visitors to Singapore. Describe some other tourist attractions and say why you think visitors enjoy them.

Obviously on a familiar and well-practised topic, this question proved popular, particularly with some of the weaker candidates who relished the opportunity to work through a list of as many of the well-known attractions of Singapore as they could manage in the time available. Despite the question referring to attractions *other than shopping*, many responses began with a well-rehearsed and colourful account of the 'shopping paradise' to be found on Orchard Road and the delights of the world-famous 'Great Singapore Sale'. Other attractions followed – some rather monotonously listed as locations, with little attempt to explain why they would be attractive to visitors. In the better scripts there was some careful grouping and the attractions were organised in paragraphs on the appeal of the geography, climate, historical sites, leisure facilities, animal and plant collections, entertainment, varieties of 'food to die for' and cultural centres. Many of these avoided the temptation to reproduce a tourist brochure in register, style and content by including brief personal anecdotes or preferences and an individual appeal to the reader: 'Wouldn't you like to join us in Singapore?' A characteristic of all the responses to this topic was the great pride and affection for their country and its multi-cultural society felt by all the candidates.

Inevitably, in what is clearly a much-practised topic in schools, there was much similarity in content and vocabulary in these essays. Most made reference to Singapore as being 'a little red dot on the world map' and included Sentosa, the Zoo, the Night Safari, the Esplanade, the Merlion, the proposed 'Integrated Resorts' and, of course, 'shopping heaven' in their lists of attractions. In most scripts, too, the errors were similar, notably those of tense, with candidates uncertain as to whether to use the present, future or modal constructions and ending up with an inconsistent mixture of them all. There was, however, a common feeling of enthusiasm and engagement in these compositions, which suggested that candidates had enjoyed this task!

Question 4

Choosing a career is one of the most important decisions to be made in life. What factors will affect your choice?

Although not as popular as some of the other topics, the theme of 'careers' was clearly familiar to the candidates and had perhaps been practised in preparation for the examination in certain Centres, where many of the candidates opted for this question. The majority of the responses, particularly within a Centre, followed a set pattern. An opening paragraph confirmed the importance of the decision and listed a number of the factors involved in the choice, in a particular order ('passion' for or 'interest' in the job, family advice, salary, location, working hours, working environment, future prospects, contribution to society). The importance, together with the order of priority, of these factors was then developed and evaluated. In the final paragraphs a conclusion was drawn although, strangely, few careers or personal ambitions were specifically and precisely identified, the discussion remaining largely generalised and theoretical. The choice of career was obviously taken very seriously but this rather stylised approach produced worthy rather than lively and convincing compositions. The more interesting and engaging responses came, as always, from those candidates who wrote from personal opinion and experience and were eager to share their hopes and anxieties for the future with the reader. Many candidates found apt quotations or sayings to mention in relation to this topic: 'Money makes the world go round'; 'Time is money'; 'If the money is good the interest will follow'; 'To fail to plan is to plan to fail' and 'As Martin Luther King said – we work so hard for jobs that we do not want so that we can buy things that we do not need.' Not all motives were materialistic; many mentioned the importance of job satisfaction, employment of talent and aptitude, status in society, parental approval, accessibility and commitment.

The organisation of ideas and progression from point to point using a variety of linking devices also suggested that there had been careful preparation for this kind of question and that candidates in some Centres had previously written a very similar essay, as they all covered the same ground and identified the same factors in the same order. The linguistic difficulties and errors found in the essays were more obvious guides to the differentiation of candidates across the ability range. Inevitably, there were errors of tense, particularly the confusion of 'would' and 'will' and the inconsistencies that arose as candidates sought to write now, about interests developed in the past and about a present and future planning process, leading to possible success or failure in the future. Subject/verb agreement and pronoun errors were also characteristic of these answers. There was a tendency for weaker candidates to repeat key words and phrases: 'choosing a career'; 'factor' and 'affect'. The word 'career' was quite often incorrectly spelled and at least two candidates misread the word as 'carer' and struggled to discuss the factors that would affect their choice should they ever need to find one... a difficult task but a worthy reminder of the need to read the question paper with the utmost care!

Question 5

Marriage.

This was by far the most popular question in **Section 1**, chosen by more than 50% of the entry overall. This was, perhaps, because the one-word title allowed a wide variety of perfectly acceptable interpretations and enabled candidates across the ability range to write to their own strengths. Approaches varied from romantic or tragic narratives to informative accounts of wedding ceremonies in different cultures, personal experiences of family life, strong opinions on the institution of marriage itself, arranged marriages and marriages of convenience and to the use of marriage as an analogy for political or trade alliances or for the union and eventual 'divorce' of Singapore and Malaysia: 'Singapore realised that the merger was simply a marriage of convenience, an ill-fated marriage from the beginning.'

The majority of candidates wrote narratives, many of the best employing an impressive range of precise and sophisticated vocabulary, a lively narrative style, effective and well punctuated dialogue and an unexpected 'twist' at the end, although some opted for rather melodramatic or unconvincing, gruesome finales. In the discursive approach, candidates showed some subtle insights into the interplay of traditional and modern values, the idealistic view of marriage and the more realistic situation suggested by the latest divorce statistics. Many expressed concern, scepticism and trepidation for 'marriage life' (sic) in their own generation: 'The Singapore Government recently released startling statistics which showed that only 55% of our youth plan to get married.' Others showed a more cynical and materialistic attitude: 'Marriage is not a high priority for me – the 5 Cs come first; credit card, car, career, condominium, cash.'

Most of these compositions were well planned in structure, thoughtful in content and clear in meaning, if not always linguistically accurate. Many candidates, within any particular Centre, seemed to be re-working the same skeleton plot: a blissful ceremony and first year of married life, a husband that then becomes drunk or unfaithful and abuses the wife, the threat of divorce followed by reconciliation or by a tragic ending. Another frequently seen scenario was that of a marriage of convenience to settle a family's debts, which is reluctantly but dutifully undertaken and leads to unexpected happiness – or to inevitable tragedy. In fact, many Examiners thought that this was another topic that had been anticipated and well prepared, as there were so many examples of scripts containing not only identical plots but also identical phrases and metaphorical passages. One Centre offered ten very similar accounts of a love-affair culminating in a wedding, which was revealed in the final paragraph to be that of a homosexual couple.

Whichever approach was taken to this topic and whatever the linguistic capability of the candidate, it was clear that these responses had been written with enthusiasm and enjoyment and they were able to arouse similar interest and engagement in the Examiners, whilst at the same time allowing clear differentiation across the ability range: this question was a success!

Section 2

The situational writing task was attempted confidently and enthusiastically by most candidates, with the most able managing to achieve an appropriate register and rhetorical style, a clear sense of audience involvement and a strong and convincing case in support of their chosen course. This success derived from careful reading of the given material and total familiarisation with the scenario before deciding on the preferred course, then planning and writing the response, developing and using relevant elements of the given information to support and justify their ideas. Some candidates had been very thoroughly prepared for this part of the paper and followed the advice given, writing with liveliness and humour and using a range of devices, particularly the rhetorical question and reference to real or imagined personalities, to support their ideas and sway the audience in a succinct, witty speech. Others, through hasty or careless reading of the rubric, wrote in letter or report format – or in a strange hybrid of a speech beginning 'Good afternoon my fellow classmates' but ending with a valediction, 'Yours faithfully' or 'Yours sincerely' and a signature. Some failed to note the instruction of the rubric to 'persuade' and 'convince' the audience and so adopted an inappropriately assertive or informative tone, failing to understand that they were required to persuade and convince the audience of the benefits of a course not yet decided upon. Many wrote at great length, extolling the positive virtues of their chosen course before dealing in equal detail with the negative aspects of the other two courses, forgetting both the suggested word limits and the risk of 'losing' their audience through boredom! Another unfortunate misconception that added to the unnecessary length of the responses was the idea that all the given material must be repeated in the response, often by straight 'lifting' from the question paper, instead of simply the relevant items being selected, paraphrased or adapted and integrated into the case being made. A few candidates introduced some of the given material successfully as quotation: 'In one of our discussions, Chang said, "Why can't we have some personal fitness training?"'.

Speeches were generally well organised. The usual plan was to refer to the proposed vacation course and the need to make a choice in the opening paragraph. Candidates then went on to speak, in turn, in favour of the chosen course and against the rejected ideas, using the final paragraph as a plea for support. Arguments and ideas were quite inventive and often gave added detail of activities to be incorporated in the course and particulars of costs, tutors and locations.

Support for the various courses was quite well balanced across the entry. Finance Management appealed to those seeking a career in business or having troubles with pocket money. Money management was seen as essential to all successful members of society. Arguments against this course were the fact that it would not be relevant until well into the future; that advice on finance could be given by parents – and it was a boring subject for a vacation course! The Personal Fitness course was favoured by those who were facing National Service training; those who were worried about obesity and its links with cancer or heart disease; those who felt they needed to ‘de-stress’ after exams – and those who wanted to look good for the ‘Prom Night’ that would be coming soon! Arguments against this course involved sympathy for those who were physically disabled and could not take part; the intense dislike of any exercise felt by many students and the fact that many years of PE lessons should have given them all the exercises that they needed to know. Finally, the First Aid course was supported by those who saw it as the only unselfish option: ‘Saving a life is more noble than building a seven storey pagoda’; those who envisaged a career in the medical profession and those who welcomed the chance to take part in the ‘hands on’ activities involved. Opponents of this choice saw a little learning as a dangerous thing and feared that their amateur attempts might make matters worse for accident victims. They felt that little of practical use could be learned in a week and that it was unlikely that they would meet with an emergency situation that would call for the skills learned to be put into practice. Furthermore, it was noted that many students belonged to the Red Cross or St. John’s Ambulance groups and would have much knowledge of First Aid already, which they could pass on to those classmates who were interested.

Several linguistic problems arose in **Section 2**. Tense control was difficult when discussing a course to be held in the future and what might be gained from it, with the inevitable confusion of future and conditional verb forms. Pronoun inconsistency was rife, as candidates moved from ‘we’ to ‘you’ to ‘they’ almost indiscriminately, which caused errors of number agreement, too. The pleasing use of the rhetorical question to suggest audience involvement was often spoiled by inaccuracy: ‘We have to choose this course, isn’t it?’ or ‘You wouldn’t like that, won’t you?’ Two surprising and frequently seen spelling errors were ‘principle’ for ‘Principal’ and ‘excerises’ for ‘exercises’. Other word confusions, some seen year after year, were: ‘know’ for ‘learn’; ‘stay’ for ‘live’; ‘bring’ for ‘take’; ‘hope’ for ‘wish’; ‘before’ for ‘ago’; ‘next time’ for ‘in the future’ and ‘last time’ for ‘in the past’.

Nevertheless, this task of situational writing was generally well received by the candidates and pleasing in the enthusiastic, relevant and humorous speeches produced, which suggested that candidates had engaged with the situation and felt at ease and confident in responding.

Final comments

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

Paper 1127/02 Comprehension

General comments

In general, the overall performance of candidates this year was similar to preceding years, although the vocabulary question proved difficult even for some of the more able. Answers were well presented and the very few candidates who failed to complete the paper appeared to do so as the result of an absence of understanding rather than a lack of time. While spelling and punctuation were mainly accurate, there seemed to be rather more errors caused by careless copying from the text than have appeared in this paper before. In **Question 11**, for example, many candidates referred to 'sheeps', although it is clear from the text that 'sheep' is the plural form of the noun.

The questions which were answered most successfully were **Question 1**, the usual intentionally straightforward introduction for candidates, and **Question 9**, which could be answered by judicious lifting from the text. The three questions where candidates were specifically forbidden to use the wording of the passage in their answers clearly presented more difficulty. Of these, **Question 2** was, on the whole, handled impressively but answers to **Question 10** were disappointing. A lack of careful reading of the text rather than an inability to find the right words denied many candidates the two marks available here. The questions which caused most problems, apart from **Question 12**, were, of course, inferential questions such as **4 (a)** and **8 (b)**. It was a little surprising, however, that so few candidates were able to answer **Question 6** accurately, as it is very clear from the wording of the passage that it was the lack of water which caused animals the most misery, and the question could be answered most simply by copying the one word, 'drought', from the passage.

Since the revision of the syllabus and the introduction of two passages, it has become rather easier for candidates to select relevant material, as the restricted number of words available means that there are fewer 'distracters' to lead them astray. However, many of the less able candidates rely heavily on the wording of the text, which means that they use up precious words unnecessarily and lose most of the marks available for both 'own words' and 'use of English'. Candidates cannot be given credit for the standard of their English when it is merely copied verbatim from the passage. Summaries of the most able candidates were, as usual, a pleasure to read.

Comments on specific questions**Question 1**

Apart from a small minority who offered 'magnificence', all candidates selected 'astounded' as the correct word to show the author's surprise, although a few lost the mark by spelling it incorrectly.

Question 2

A significant number simply re-cast 'camouflaged' as 'blends into the background' which, by itself, was not enough as it did not spell out *how* this helped the tiger hunt its prey. The addition of 'and keep it hidden while it hunts its prey' or 'so that it could not be seen by its prey' was necessary to gain the mark.

Question 3

Candidates were required here to describe the method the big cats used to hunt their prey – they singled out from the others, those animals which could not run as fast as, or could not keep up with the rest. Although this was not specifically an 'own words' question, answers which relied wholly on 'isolating' or 'slower members' were unacceptable because they did not provide evidence that candidates had understood the process. Some of the less able candidates were wholly unable to identify successfully who the slower members of the herd were, even though the word 'herd' should have been a sufficient clue. They thought that the slower cats were left behind because they would have been a handicap to the others on their hunting expeditions.

Question 4

- (a) This was an inferential question which proved surprisingly difficult. The idea was that gazelles need to be able to run at least as fast as their predators and keep going longer. Answers like 'so that they can outrun their predators which cannot keep going for so long' gained both the marks available. However, many candidates simply wrote 'gazelles developed the ability to run fast over long periods because the predators became more agile and cunning' or similar, omitting completely the essential comparative element. A minority of candidates were uncertain which animals were predators and which were prey, so qualities were sometimes wrongly attributed or mixed.
- (b) This question required candidates to identify the two 'sets of participants in the fight', prey and predator, and to explain the effect of nature's 'fine-tuning' i.e. that the predators have become more agile and cunning while the prey have become faster and their senses keener. Answers which pointed out that the balance of power had been *maintained* gained one mark, while those who wrote that it was *now* an equal match failed to score because it had always been so.

Question 5

- (a) This question was handled well by the majority of candidates. The emotion which prompts people to help others in danger is described in the passage as 'pity' but those who chose instead to find a synonym were able to earn the mark with 'compassion' or 'sympathy'.
- (b) Candidates in this 'own words' question were able to gain the two marks available in different ways. They could either re-cast 'self-preservation is forgotten' with 'they do not think about their own safety', or they could make the more general point, that they are willing to sacrifice their own lives for those of others. Many candidates lost marks by copying the word 'risk' from the passage. One other common error was to equate 'self-preservation' with selfishness and thus to elicit responses referring to putting others before themselves, lacking the element of danger or risk while, in some cases, candidates denied themselves the second mark by a careless omission of 'others' or 'other people'; for example, 'they sacrifice themselves to help'.

Question 6

This seemingly straightforward question produced, in fact, few correct answers. The majority of candidates appear to have read the first sentence only and deduced that it was the 'weather' which had 'made the struggle for existence miserable for the animals'. Had they read on they would have found that the passage states quite unequivocally: 'When drought strikes, a miserable struggle for existence begins'. Answers could focus either in the lack of water or on the thirst that this engenders, and one word answers of 'drought' or 'thirst' were sufficient to earn the mark.

Question 7

The other word which tells the travellers that they were in a 'sun-baked desert' was correctly identified by approximately half the candidates as 'parched'. Candidates who did not recognise this word were often left floundering and the numerous incorrect suggestions included 'delineated', 'monotony', 'bleak', 'panorama' and even 'Gobi'.

Question 8

- (a) Many candidates realised correctly that the particularly alarming aspect was the fact that the travellers did not realise they were falling. However, a minority answered the question simply by quoting the sentence which immediately followed the relevant section in the passage – i.e. 'This pattern was repeated for all three of us, but we simply could not capitulate', which was clearly incorrect, as was the implication that they became unconscious when they fell. Some tried for a literal interpretation: 'the falls might kill them' or 'they were dehydrated', while copiers were drawn to 'mounting fatigue made their legs feel as if they were encased in iron'. The straight lift of 'I was not conscious of having fallen' was popular but clearly could not provide an answer to a question about 'the travellers'.
- (b) To answer this question, candidates needed to recognise the threat inherent in the phrase 'the clutching fingers of death'. The most successful answers were along the following lines: 'These indicated or were a sign that they were close to death'. However, there were many which stated categorically that the travellers were dying, which was clearly not the case as they survived to escape from the desert at the end of the passage. A minority of candidates tried to relate the phrase to the presumed behaviour of the travellers as they fell or after they had fallen, yielding such answers as 'the author wants me to understand that they are clutching at the sand with their fingers as they try to get up and avoid death'.

Question 9

The sentence ‘...and trees must surely indicate the presence of water’ made the travellers’ expectations very clear and the majority of candidates had little trouble in interpreting the reasons for their disappointment. In fact there were three – that there was little water, that such water was muddy and that there was nothing for them to eat – and candidates could score with any two of them. Those who wrote ‘there was *no* water’ lost the mark for a lack of precision as did those who wrote ‘there were only snakes to eat’, as, at this stage, they did not realise that snakes could be a source of nourishment.

Question 10

There were many confused answers to this question, which required both a close reading of the text and an ‘own words’ presentation. The best attempts were to the point, focusing, firstly, on what Kolenos did to teach his companions how to make a stick with which to trap a snake, and, secondly, on his killing of the snake caught by Zoro. A third way to score a mark here was by pointing out that Kolenos was the one who suggested snakes as a source of food when the others doubted it was possible. The main weaknesses were misinterpretations of the text – thinking that the stick was a weapon for killing the snake or implying that Kolenos rather than Zoro caught the snake which he killed. Answers which relied on text wording, such as ‘he severed the snake’s head from its body’, were clearly unable to score.

Question 11

The fact that the sentence ‘At last we were certain that we had escaped from that infernal land’ immediately followed Kolenos’s reply to Rawicz’s question i.e. ‘Yes, Rawicz, they’re sheep all right’ should have alerted candidates to the fact that it was the sight of sheep which was the answer to this question. A preamble which mentioned green grass and ‘white flecks’ did not deny the mark, but a relatively high number of candidates mentioned, in addition, the ‘towering mountain range’, ‘gentle breeze’ and ‘clumps of grass sprouting from cracks in the arid soil’, which did. The incorrect plural ‘sheeps’ was prevalent, which was both disturbing and unnecessary because candidates only had to copy the word correctly from the text.

Question 12

The vocabulary question proved a good discriminator, with most candidates correctly identifying ‘embellishment’ as ‘decoration’ or ‘display’, and ‘debility’ as ‘weakness’ or ‘tiredness’. ‘Relic’ defeated many for, although they appeared to have a rough idea of the meaning of the word, they did not appreciate its relevance in the context of something left behind – ‘remnant’, ‘trace’ or ‘left-over’, and, instead, offered ‘old’, ‘ancient’ or ‘from long ago’. ‘Voraciously’ caused a few more problems with answers which mostly related to speed rather than manner, and only the very best candidates realised that ‘infernal’ could be translated either literally as ‘hellish’ or figuratively as ‘terrible’ or ‘dreadful’.

Question 13

Candidates were required to summarise the various ways in which nature has equipped animals and human beings so that they can survive. Most candidates proved competent at selecting relevant material from the passage and a pleasingly high number demonstrated that it was possible to produce the maximum 15 for content within the word allowance and using largely ‘own words’, especially when a wise selection of material was accompanied by phrasing which was carefully organised to avoid repetition. Candidates did not appear to suffer from a lack of time, apart from those who wrote a long first draft, which they then proceeded to whittle down to the required length. This clearly was not helpful as it often led to the erroneous deletion of apposite points. The ones who began with a list of points which they wished to include (in note form) before turning them into continuous prose performed considerably better in both style and content.

The first three relevant paragraphs, numbers **2**, **3** and **4**, dealt solely with animal characteristics. Most candidates understood the reasons why animals were given their distinctive colourings, as a warning device, for camouflage purposes or to attract mates. Those who lost marks here did so mainly by failing to see that it was the males whose bright colours attracted females to mate with them and not vice versa. Many candidates neatly amalgamated the idea of the leopard’s and tiger’s use of camouflage to stalk their prey although this section did cause considerable difficulty with the use of apostrophes and correct verb forms as a result.

By far the largest area in the summary dealt with the attributes which make the big cats successful predators and allow the grazing animals, which are their prey, to escape as frequently as they do. Most candidates understood that it was the speed of both sets of animals which was paramount here, together with the stealth of the predator and the keen senses of the prey. Marks were lost here by a lack of attention to detail: the big cats move *silently* (soundlessly or noiselessly) not *quietly* and keep close to the ground rather than just move carefully or the equivalent. The predators are also equipped with sharp claws and teeth for *killing* their prey, we are told, not for attacking them or devouring them afterwards.

Paragraphs 5 and 6 introduced human beings into the equation and this sometimes caused confusion. Candidates did not always discriminate with sufficient care between the two and, in attempting to amalgamate material, produced inaccuracies: a sixth sense causes *animals* to freeze in order to avoid detection and *human beings* to run further and faster than normal, not the other way round. In addition, while a sixth sense may well produce prodigious feats in human beings' abilities, clearly no-one is capable of running faster *than possible*. Many candidates did not pick up more marks by failing to see that the comparative 'than usual' was necessary here and wrote: 'instinct caused human beings to run fast and keep going for a long time'.

A significant number of the less able candidates concentrated too heavily on the earlier part of the passage and introduced such irrelevancies as 'the fight for survival is a drama played out on the plains of Africa where herds of animals eat grass under the eye of lions and cheetahs'. Other unnecessary inclusions were the sentence 'but nature has decreed that both hunter and hunted are equally matched in this contest for survival', which was too vague to score a mark, and, from towards the end of the passage, 'there is a theory that this is just a relic of the co-operative animal behaviour which we learnt as hunters at an early stage of our evolution', which was clearly extraneous here. An obvious example where copying from the text used up unnecessary words occurred when candidates wrote, 'their sharp claws and dagger-like teeth will swiftly bring the killing process to its inevitable conclusion', where a simple 'they use their sharp claws and teeth to kill their prey' would have been eminently preferable.

Although the most able candidates produced English of a very high standard, there was considerable confusion with agreements of subject and verb. This was particularly evident early on in the summary where candidates' attempts at synthesis produced sentences like 'The tiger's stripes and leopard's spotted coat *enables* it to camouflage (sic) as it stalks its prey' but it also occurred elsewhere, with examples such as 'this is why humans *is* superior'. Even where a distinction was made between the two animals there was a lack of awareness that 'the tiger's stripes' refer to a single animal, producing errors such as 'the tiger's stripes enable *them* to stay hidden'. Problems with the handling of verbs also took the form of an inconsistency in the use of tenses, for example 'the prey *became* faster and *develop* keener senses' and 'another gift that nature *has* given human beings *was* instinct' and faulty verb constructions such as 'this instinct *triggers us* to run further' and 'to *avoid* other creatures *from* eating them'. Other errors of syntax were the omission of the definite and indefinite articles as in 'prey have ability to run quickly' and 'they predict nature of threat', and an occasional misuse of prepositions like 'the stripes enable them to blend *to* their surroundings' and 'nature has implanted instinct *on* animals'. While spelling was generally sound, there were some unfortunate lapses involving words which could have been copied accurately from the text: mention of the tiger's 'strips' was frequently followed by reference to 'preys', although the passage consistently uses the latter in the singular. Summaries were mainly accurate in the use of punctuation, apart from a puzzling tendency in some candidates to insert unnecessary and intrusive commas, as, for example, 'tigers, have stripes while leopards, have spotted coats, to hide them from their prey.'