

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1127/01

Composition

General comments

There was a considerable increase in the number of candidates entered for the examination this year and it was obvious from the enthusiasm and confidence with which they tackled the paper that both the candidates and their teachers have become fully accustomed to the new syllabus. In the Composition component of the syllabus, most candidates wrote clearly, purposefully and confidently, making a determined effort to demonstrate their linguistic skills and to interest the Examiners. They had been carefully taught and well prepared for the examination and were clearly well aware of what was required to tackle the Paper. It was heartening to see that the high standards of past years had been maintained with a sound level of competence from most candidates, few very weak scripts and an increasing number of excellent responses, written with natural fluency, a wide, yet appropriate and precise vocabulary, and a degree of accuracy that Examiners found extremely impressive.

The Question Paper offered a range of topics in **Section One**, all of which found favour with some candidates and seemed to be accessible to them. However, a significant minority of the candidates choosing **Question 3** did not understand the expression 'well-being', which they interpreted as 'well-behaved' and thus 'disciplined', or as 'well-mannered' and thus 'polite', or as 'being well' and therefore synonymous with 'health'. It was noticeable that certain topics, such as **Questions 1 and 2**, were particularly popular in some Centres, almost to the exclusion of other choices, whereas in other Centres, **Questions 3 and 4** were those most frequently chosen. No one question proved more difficult than any other and candidates responded well to familiar or imaginative situations or to thought-provoking tasks. Although the narrative genre of **Question 1** and the wide scope for interpretation in **Question 2** made these the most popular choices, especially for some weaker candidates, many of the more able linguists rose to the challenge of the discursive topics of **Questions 3 and 4** and seemed well prepared for these themes. **Question 5**, seeking personal opinions on a familiar topic, was again a very popular choice in some Centres, but presented some difficulties with tenses, many candidates getting unnecessarily tied up in the conditional tense, when the present (used in the rubric of the question) or the future would have been easier and more natural.

Most responses were carefully planned and well developed, following a chronological narrative exposition or a logically developed argument. Essays were cohesive, carefully paragraphed and showing a good command of varied sentence structure. There was much ambitious, relevant and precise use of vocabulary and a strong sense of personal engagement.

There were no misinterpretations of the rubric and very few short or unfinished essays were seen. Most candidates wrote with enthusiasm and at impressive length on their chosen topic in **Section One**. Examiners always express surprise at how much candidates manage to write within the time limit of the examination; in fact, in many cases, excessive length, well beyond the word limits suggested on the Question Paper, proves counter-productive. Often writing at such length leads to repetition, loss of interest in the subject and, almost certainly, to an increase in error. More time spent thinking and planning and checking for errors that can be remedied, would produce a more concise, well-structured, accurate and effective essay, as many of the most able candidates have realised. There were some instances of candidates writing at such great length in **Section One** that **Section Two** was not attempted and some where, perhaps advisedly, **Section Two** had been written first, but most candidates organised the time wisely and were able to complete both Sections of the paper and still have time to check and correct their work if necessary. It should be noted, however, that the use of correcting fluid is expressly forbidden in the Instructions on the cover sheet of the Question Paper, yet it was still seen on many scripts – with the attendant danger that words erased were not replaced or correct words were made illegible. Errors should be crossed out neatly with a single line and the correct word inserted above to maintain legibility.

Candidates had been well taught and thoroughly prepared for the nature of the task in **Section Two**. This year's scenario provided a lot of material from which the candidate could select and weaker candidates found this particularly helpful in focusing on the task, most resisting the temptation to 'lift' word-for-word from the given text but many gratefully adapting ideas and expressions. The material given needed to be assimilated thoroughly so that it could be used in a situation that challenged the thinking skills of the candidates and their ability to apply their own imagination and creativity to the realisation and organisation of the task. The ability to incorporate appropriate, detailed suggestions relating to the organisation of the chosen event proved an important means of differentiation of the more able candidates, who had been able to think themselves into the task and identify with the situation – the key to success in this Section.

The most common language errors found were, as always, those of tense, verb form and sentence structure. Inconsistency of tense, particularly veering between past and present in the narrative essays, was particularly noticeable and led to further confusion of specified time between 'today' (present) and 'that day' (past) and between 'tomorrow' (present) and 'the next day' (past), especially in the course of direct or reported speech. Sentence separation by use of the comma splice rather than a full stop was much less frequently seen this year, which was pleasing but many of the usual structural errors were still found:

Faulty use of 'but' to begin a clause following the use of 'Although'; 'where' rather than 'when' to begin a clause of time; misuse of the present participle: 'Standing rooted to the spot, the teacher walked towards me.....'; 'As...' or 'When...' to begin a sentence when no subsequent clause is provided – and perhaps the most prevalent of all this year, the use of 'And ...' or 'But...' to begin a sentence, rather than linking two ideas into a good complex sentence.

Errors of number agreement were also common, often the result of speed or failure to consider the logic of the statement:

Nature reserves were seen as singular: 'Nature reserves can be used as a place to relax and let your hair down or even as a place where inspiration can be found.' 'Nature reserves also contributes to the growth of Singapore's tourism industry.'

Many people had only one mind, life or body: 'This plays an important role in some people's life and we can relax our mind.' 'As a person, often we want to achieve something.' 'These candidates will soon be a member of our school.'

Candidates still have a tendency to begin narratives with a 'purple passage' of elevated prose: 'The sun rose in a pool of crimson and gold, spilling light all over the land....' soon to be followed by 'Ring ring, my alarm clock rang.' Similarly, prepared 'sophisticated' vocabulary is inserted into the narrative (sometimes inappropriately) and whilst 'indelibly etched', 'the abyss of despair' or 'the vibrant atmosphere' may be impressive when seen for the first time, the effect is not the same if the phrases appear in every script from that Centre!

There was the usual scattering of invented words: 'worriness'; 'gratitudeness'; 'enjoyful' – although spelling on the whole was good. Unfortunately many of the most common spelling errors could have been avoided, as they occurred in words given on the Question Paper: 'committee', 'principal', 'offer', 'ensure', 'successful'.

Punctuation and paragraphing were very sound, with the use of the apostrophe and the paragraphing of direct speech causing the most problems.

It is very disappointing to see the errors of idiom and expression pointed out in so many previous reports occurring yet again: 'bring' for 'take'; 'find' for 'look for'; 'know' for 'learn'; 'stay' for 'live'; 'reached' for 'arrived', 'wear' for 'put on'; 'wash up myself' for 'wash myself'; 'since young' for 'when I was young'. Often the error involves non-idiomatic use of prepositions: 'discuss about'; 'descend down'; 'in Sunday morning'; 'hail for a cab'; 'get off the taxi'; 'out of a sudden'; 'come out with'; 'clear out any doubts'; 'put up a show'; 'voice out' for 'tell'.

The use of superfluous words also seemed prevalent this year: 'For me, personally, I prefer'; 'In my opinion, I think'; 'as such I want to'; 'an idea of how the school looks like'.

The use of 'texting' symbols was again evident, particularly 'u' and 'ur' and even 'no.' ('I believe quite a no. of parents will be unable to attend...'), despite previous warnings that there is no place for these in formal written English.

Finally, several Examiners commented this year on the decline in the legendary neat presentation and easy legibility of scripts written by candidates from Singapore. Many examples were found of badly formed handwriting, scrawl that was difficult to decipher or microscopic writing in which neither upstrokes nor downstrokes were clearly defined and where capital letters were indistinguishable by size or form. Teachers should advise candidates to remedy this situation, as it is trying to Examiners' eyesight and patience to struggle to read ill-written scripts and inevitably, illegibility hinders the flow of communication and ideas from writer to reader.

There were variations between Centres, as might be expected, but the overall standard of work produced by Singaporean candidates was well in line with that achieved in past years and bore testimony to the hard work of teachers and candidates alike. As always, Examiners expressed the pleasure, interest and satisfaction they had found in the marking of scripts for Syllabus 1127.

Comments on specific questions

Section One

Question 1

Write about a time when your late arrival for a particular meeting or event led to serious trouble.

This was a popular choice. The subject was accessible to all candidates and the question itself provided a straightforward narrative structure, establishing a clear starting and finishing point and creating a logical story, with the opportunity to use effective, well-heard dialogue to dramatic effect. The best essays had realism, interest and immediacy, building up a sense of character, relationship and tension. The late arrival, frequently caused by over-sleeping or involvement in traffic jams, usually led to the failure of a business deal and subsequent dismissal from the company, a missed or failed examination, a lost sports fixture, or the loss, injury, even death, of a sibling, parent, grandparent or friend. There were some sensitive descriptions of the feelings of shame, guilt and anguish felt by the narrators and the stories usually ended with a resolution never to be late again, summed up in a short proverbial expression: 'I learned the lesson the hard way.' or 'You have to fall in order to grow.'

The liveliest and most successful accounts were those based on a scenario within the candidates' experience, many of which had a convincing ring of truth! Some captured well the sense of time running out: 'My wrist watch seemed to be fixed to work at double speed.' In others the drama became melodrama with the imagery exaggerated to the point of absurdity: 'Tears of relief plummeted down her cheeks'.

Some weaker candidates used the opportunity to re-work old stories, making them fit with varying degrees of success. The main language problems in this question were those of tense, with some confusion between past and present, particularly for those candidates who employed the 'flashback' technique or included direct speech in the narrative. However, this question was generally well answered, particularly when the 'chapter of accidents' was made credible.

Question 2

Dreams.

This was the most popular topic from **Section One**, particularly for the middle range and weaker candidates. It was interpreted mainly in one of three different ways: as a narrative; as an explanation of the meaning of the word, e.g. daydreaming, dreaming whilst sleeping or the writer's ambitions; or as an intellectual philosophical discussion with reference to historical figures such as Martin Luther King.

For those candidates who followed the narrative treatment, there was the obvious temptation to re-hash previously written compositions, often beginning with an accurate and thoughtful first paragraph but developing into action-packed, often horrific adventures, which may have had their origin in video games or fantasy films and generally ended with the narrator being woken by his mother ('As the monsters were about to chew on my flesh I felt a sharp pinch on my back...') or his alarm clock, only to realise 'It was only a dream!'

Candidates found it more difficult to structure the more generalised approach to the topic, most choosing to begin with a definition or with a generalisation: 'Dreams are an important part of everyone'. There were persistent problems with agreement: 'Everyone have a dreams. It can be a nice dreams or a scary dream.' Weaker candidates had not planned their responses and these unstructured, repetitive compositions, mentioning vague abstractions in imprecise vocabulary, often petered out having provided very little clarity of thought or interest to the reader. Some more able candidates analysed the nature and possible causes of dreams, nightmares and daydreaming, suggesting that troubling events of the day reappear in nightmares, solutions to our problems are found or wishful thinking finds fulfilment in dreams. Writers, artists, scientists and inventors were quoted as having been inspired to success in life through their dreams.

Candidates who treated the topic as an opportunity to air their ambitions in life wrote with interest and involvement, often describing how their childhood aspirations had changed with age and with greater awareness of the needs of others: 'I want to set up a café and employ the handicapped'; 'I want to be a boss so I can help the needys' (sic); 'I want to win the lottery and help the poor and disadvantaged.' Some moved beyond their own dreams ('the most important is I can get B4 for this exam'), to those of 'a tranquil world without war', and 'a peaceful culture where people are not preoccupied with drugs, sex and gambling.' Many candidates made reference to the dream of Martin Luther King 'whose powerful words are an inspiration to many.' Despite having problems with tense and verb forms, as they moved between past, present and future ambitions, most candidates, whatever their linguistic level, wrote with genuine engagement and feeling on this topic.

Question 3

What do you think secondary schools can do to ensure the health, well-being and safety of their candidates?

This was the least popular topic but still one chosen by a sizeable minority of candidates. This topic produced the shortest answers, with arguments often undeveloped and superficial in the hands of the weaker candidates, but with more thoughtful and more fluent candidates, Examiners were treated to some well-structured responses, which provided interesting insights into the operation of Singaporean schools. Most candidates gave equal weight to the three aspects of the question although, as previously mentioned, many misinterpreted the term 'well-being' or ignored it completely. The topic offered a clear structure, which most writers were happy to accept as the basis for their response, dealing with each aspect in turn and writing from their own experience about the measures taken in their own school and others. The provision of appropriately healthy food in the canteen and of opportunities for regular exercise in the curriculum was seen as essential for candidates' health. There were also some wise words about the maintenance of cleanliness in school classrooms and the canteen. Some candidates said that the moral and spiritual welfare of the candidates should be nurtured by the services of stress counsellors and arrangements should be made for 'quiet' areas within the school. Ideas to ensure safety included fire drills, first aid training, regular checks on school equipment, employment of security guards and CCTV cameras and the careful monitoring of visitors to the school. It was also suggested that schools should have 'opinion boxes' and 'set up more channels for candidates to express their opinions' to deal with problems such as bullying and abuse. The best essays were well constructed and moved logically through the material. Repetition was a frequent fault, particularly of the key words of the question itself and of links such as 'where by', 'hereby' and 'hence', which were often inappropriately used, both here and in the other discursive essays seen this year.

Question 4

Given the limited land available in Singapore, is it wise to set aside some areas as nature reserves?

This topic was not popular among the candidature as a whole but proved very popular and successful in certain Centres. In some essays it was mentioned openly that aspects of this topic featured in the Geography syllabus and thus, in Centres where this part of the curriculum had been covered, candidates rejoiced at their good fortune and tackled the subject with enthusiasm. They were generally confident of their material and able to produce thoughtful, well-supported arguments employing appropriate economic, sociological and geographical terminology. Inevitably, this led to some similarity of content, which was relevant and usually technically correct in both fact and vocabulary. However, this was not a Geography examination and candidates were asked to express and defend an opinion, not merely rehearse the arguments on both sides. This proved difficult for some, who remained uncommitted but most who attempted this question had both interest and strong views on the subject and argued their case strongly with a range of effective rhetorical devices. Many essays began with the familiar description of Singapore as 'a small red dot on the map', to emphasise the scarcity of land, lack of resources and the need to compete with successful neighbours. Despite these considerations, almost all candidates who wrote on this topic

supported the preservation of nature reserves, recognising the importance of the reserves as educational, scientific and recreational resources, as well as tourist attractions to some of the few remaining mangrove and rain forest habitats in the world. Candidates were well informed about ecological and environmental issues and some saw a moral responsibility to preserve such areas as the nature reserves in the face of global warming and environmental pollution. Some candidates widened the concept of nature reserves to include some of the public parks and zoos and to stress the need for places of human recreation and tranquillity within the 'concrete jungle' and for the conservation of rare animal and insect species.

Most of the essays on this topic were well planned and cogently argued. There was frequent repetition, both of points of the argument and of words and phrases from the Question in some of the weaker responses, where tense consistency and subject/verb number agreement also caused problems.

Question 5.

Do you feel that you need the long school vacation? How do you occupy your time during the December break, when schools are closed?'

This was a very popular choice in some Centres, offering the opportunity for personal opinion and comment and for informal and sometimes humorous accounts of familiar and enjoyable activities. It attracted candidates right across the ability range and virtually all the responses were successful in terms of relevance. Some candidates sacrificed the chance to explain their desperate need for a long vacation following the pressure, stress and hard work of the school term, with the unremitting demands of the academic and CCA curriculum, to give free rein to their many and varied leisure activities. Others seized the opportunity to engage the sympathy and understanding of the Examiner, explaining that 'During the term, your home seems to be a place only to eat, sleep and do homework' and that there is the need for 'a month for my brain to have a really good rest.' Further appeal to the Examiner was seen in subtle hints: 'I hope I can get a good result in my exam so that I can enjoy my vacation.' There were a few candidates who felt that the vacation was too long: 'Candidates like me will feel boring at home.' For some it was 'just long hours in bed and computer games.' They missed their friends and 'would like to do more revision to catch up.'

Following such comments on the time available, most candidates then explained their extensive plans for the holiday, which included: overseas travel, family time, learning a new skill or another language, 'hanging out' with friends, volunteering to help at the old folks' home or orphanage, stocking up on new school uniform items or books for the new term, playing sport, pursuing hobbies, watching TV, taking part-time paid employment – and resting! Generally the priority was to engage with the family again, helping with chores and visiting neglected grandparents. Following this, most sought part-time work for pocket money or 'to gain work-life skills' and were also genuinely keen to undertake charity work and 'talk to the elderly and massage their shoulders'. Almost all stated that the final week of the vacation would be spent preparing for the coming term.

The most common language problem with this topic was tense inconsistency. As has already been mentioned, the present tense, in which the question was couched, was an obvious choice, but many lost control of tenses when trying to explain what they had done in the past and what was planned for the approaching holiday. All Examiners commented on the persistent and unnecessary use of the conditional: 'During the vacation I would finish my homework', when the simple present or future tense would have been easier and more appropriate.

This topic produced the greatest range of achievement but was also one of the most interesting for Examiners to mark, giving considerable insight into the organisation and function of the secondary school system in Singapore and into the daily lives, ambitions and determination of the candidates themselves.

Section Two

The Situational Writing task posed few major problems for candidates this year and was tackled with enthusiasm and a sense of purpose. The scenario of transfer to secondary school and the problems of anxiety, adjustment and new resolve in the primary school candidates involved were familiar to all candidates, so they could easily identify with the situation and write with the confidence of personal experience.

Many candidates seemed to have been schooled in the use and layout of the report format, providing details of the addressee, author, date and subject heading before embarking on a carefully paragraphed report on the required aspects of the matter in hand. In some Centres the conventions of this format had perhaps not been covered and the more familiar letter layout was preferred for this task. This was a perfectly acceptable means of communicating the information to the Principal, provided that the basic requirements of this format – greeting, date, valediction and signature – were applied. Unfortunately, a number of candidates left out one or more of the required elements (frequently the date) or produced hybrid report/letter formats with either the greeting or valediction omitted.

Almost all candidates understood the purpose of the task and made this clear in their opening paragraphs: 'I have evaluated the ideas of all my fellow committee members and have decided, after careful consideration, on the best way to help our future candidates settle quickly and happily in our school.' Some responses however, seemed to be directed more towards persuading parents and primary school candidates to select their school in preference to others in the area and candidates virtually planned a marketing campaign to attract new candidates.

Most candidates addressed the question of choice and used the given information to justify their preference. Some focused immediately and effectively on the chosen idea and explained its advantages in relation to the information given, with detailed and imaginative ideas for organising the event. Others felt the need to consider each possibility in turn and explain the reasons for its rejection before settling on the merits and arrangements of the selected option. Both were acceptable approaches, although in some cases the latter produced an imbalance in the response, with less attention given to the chosen idea than to those rejected and little time to develop details of organisation. Many such answers were far too long and the impact of the chosen proposal was lost. Some weaker candidates succumbed to the temptation merely to repeat the given information, with little amplification or adaptation of the language or the ideas.

All four proposals found some support but the most popular choice was Lili's idea of holding an 'Open House', a method that appears to be commonly employed by many schools in Singapore. Candidates were generally sensitive to the needs of new candidates to accommodate to new teachers and academic subjects, to find their way around unfamiliar buildings, to choose from a range of possible CCA groups and to make new friends; the Open House event was carefully planned to cater for these requirements so that the candidates would be reassured that they would be happy in their new school. There were some candidates who were unable to narrow their choice to one and who suggested combining two or three of the ideas. Others did not make a specific decision but left the choice to the Principal.

Most responses showed an awareness of the Principal as their audience although it was surprising to find many referring to the recipient of their report in the third person: 'The Principal could give a talk' or 'I hope the Principal will consider my idea'. It was disappointing to see the frequency with which the report was addressed to 'the Principle', following a meeting of 'the comitee', even though the correct spellings were supplied on the Question Paper!

The tone was generally suitably respectful and polite, although occasionally somewhat peremptory and the register was mainly appropriate save for references to 'kids' and 'stuff' and even occasionally 'texting' symbols, which were hardly suitable for the given audience.

Generally, the language of **Section Two** was more accurate than that of **Section One**, perhaps not surprisingly given the amount of text on the Question Paper but tense control (particularly the confusion of 'would' and 'will') and idiomatic errors caused problems. Though there was, inevitably, some lifting of individual words, phrases or even sentences from the Question Paper, there was little wholesale copying, which was 'a credit to the teachers and the candidates', observed one Examiner. Some candidates cleverly made the copying of some passages legitimate, by enclosing the quotation correctly within inverted commas: 'Sushila said, "A group of us should go to the primary school one afternoon and talk to the candidates there about our school."' However, other members of the committee were worried that we would miss our lessons.'

Most responses were logically structured, relevant and engaging. Whilst clearly accessible and enjoyed by candidates across the ability range, this task was particularly successful in achieving the desired differentiation and challenging the candidates' thinking skills.

Final Comments

As in previous years, the many Examiners involved in the marking of Singaporean scripts have emphasised their appreciation of the clarity and accuracy of expression of so many of the candidates and of the high level of interest and detail to be found in the essays, which appear to have been written with enthusiasm and clear recognition of the status and value of this examination.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1127/02
Comprehension

General comments

The overall performance of candidates was at least as good as in recent years, and the best candidates continue to produce work that is a pleasure to read. The paper was tackled very sensibly by the vast majority of candidates, few failed to complete it and almost all followed the rubric instructions. Answers were well presented and spelling and punctuation were mainly accurate, but there does seem to be a developing tendency for some candidates to write in very small handwriting which sometimes renders parts of the paper almost illegible. Candidates do not appear to have experienced any difficulty with the passages' technical vocabulary, although most candidates scored more heavily on Passage B. While the standard of writing in the summary question was generally impressive, there were still those who relied too heavily on lifting from the text; problems which occurred with the accurate use of language were often caused by errors in verb forms and the omission of the definite article.

The opening two questions, tests of language understanding and simple logic, were generally answered well by most candidates but **Question 4**, a more testing inferential question, caused some difficulty. Other questions which proved relatively straightforward were **Questions 6, 7 and 10**, while few candidates scored both marks for **Questions 8 (b) or 11 (a)**. The vocabulary question was handled better than last year, and most candidates tried to relate the words to their use in the text, rather than giving 'dictionary' definitions. Very few gained full marks, with 'pervasiveness' causing the most difficulty.

Comments on specific questions

Passage A

Question 1

Almost all candidates identified 'interlinked' as the word which indicates that the oceans of the world run into each other. Most of the few who failed to score did so either because they gave more than one word – usually 'interlinked areas' – or because they copied the word incorrectly, for example, 'interlink'.

Question 2

A majority of candidates gained the mark here by writing that 'featureless plains' means flat land, while some looked further along the sentence and correctly identified 'hills and valleys' as being the kind of 'features' we thought did not exist under the ocean. A few tried lifting 'we now know that they contain as many hills and valleys as exist on dry land', which clearly did not answer the question. Other common incorrect answers included 'it was a dull, or boring, place' and 'there was nothing there'.

Question 3

The wording of the passage makes it very clear that the second way in which water is necessary for our survival is by 'supporting our agriculture' and correct 'own word' equivalents selected included 'by helping our farmers' and 'by enabling us to grow crops' or, more simply, 'water is essential for the growth of crops'. Many candidates did not gain marks here by a less than careful reading of the passage which led them to stray into the subsequent sentence with answers like 'the oceans provide fish for us to eat'.

Question 4

This was probably the most testing question on the paper, answered correctly by only the very ablest candidates. They needed to infer what effect the absence of the fishing **fleets** had on the communities on shore, so it was not sufficient to say that there were no fish for them to eat, as most did. Correct answers focused on the fate of those who had depended on the fishermen, for example, 'there is now no work for the inhabitants on shore' and 'those involved in the fishing industry on shore are now unemployed' or 'have lost their livelihood'.

Question 5

There are clearly two meanings to the phrase 'from pole to pole', the literal: 'from the North to the South Pole' and the figurative: 'everywhere, all over the world or oceans'. Many candidates failed to spot the clue in the clue in the question – 'explain **fully** what you understand...' – or the fact that there were two marks on offer here, and contented themselves with providing only one part of the answer. Some misunderstood the word 'pole', often thinking that it had something to do with fishing, and others spoiled their answers by writing from one end of the world to another, instead of the other'.

Question 6

The answer lies in the preceding sentence but many candidates lost the mark here by relying on a straight lift from the passage, which clearly would not answer the question as it is phrased. Answers needed to be recast to explain what 'we' or 'human beings' must do, that is that we must never leave litter in rivers, on beaches or in the sea (one of these alternatives would suffice).

Passage B

Question 7

Most candidates realised that, as this was an 'own words' question, they could not get away with merely saying that Antarctica provided 'rich feeding grounds' for whales. Acceptable alternatives included 'there was plenty of food' or 'much to eat' there. Answers which said merely that there were 'plenty of fish' failed to score, as did those which presented weak synonyms for 'rich' such as there was an 'adequate' food supply or 'sufficient' food.

Question 8

- (a) The key words in this question were 'welded' and 'bed' and most candidates understood the implication that the weight of the chains and anchors kept the net firmly 'attached', 'fused' or 'joined' to the ocean bed. Fewer candidates saw the need for an explanation of 'bed' ('floor' or 'bottom'), which was necessary to earn the second mark.
- (b) Candidates were asked to explain in their own words why, in spite of its entanglement, the whale continued to swim south. While many clearly understood that the words which required synonyms were 'overwhelming' and 'impulse', many found these difficult to provide. Acceptable answers for the latter were more common and took the form of 'urge', 'instinct' or 'compulsion', while 'wish' or 'it wanted to' were deemed too weak to score. Very few even attempted to explain 'overwhelming' but the ablest candidates correctly offered 'it was overcome by' or 'it could not resist'. Some of the weakest candidates wrote that the whale continued to swim on because whales are incapable of swimming backwards, a point which they picked up from earlier in the same paragraph.

Question 9

Candidates who read the passage carefully had no difficulty in discovering why the helicopter pilots had been having difficulty in finding the whale and most used the wording of the text: 'the whale was swimming a little further out than expected'. Of the 'own word' attempts, those who wrote that the whale was swimming 'a little further from the shore' were accurate, while answers which simply said that the whale had swum further were too imprecise to earn the mark. Some weaker candidates failed to score because they quoted the whole sentence – 'one of the helicopter pilots had located the whale a little further out than expected' – verbatim, without recasting it to answer the question. Others chose to ignore the evidence from the passage and presented such fanciful answers as 'the whale was mostly submerged so the pilots could not see it' and 'the whale was surrounded by other whales, making it difficult to spot'.

Question 10

The reason that the rescue mission had become 'potentially far more dangerous' could be divided in two and there was a mark for each. Firstly, the whale had been joined by three others (or there were now four of them) and the vast majority of candidates gained the mark here. However, four whales in themselves do not necessarily constitute danger, and the second mark was earned only by the relatively few candidates who inferred from this that the extra three could possibly try to defend their injured friend, attack the rescuers or, in general, become aggressive in some way.

Question 11

- (a) Surprisingly few candidates saw the similarity between car mechanics mending a lorry on a motorway and the rescuers' attempts to save the whale. Perhaps the clearest inferential comparison was in the size of both lorry and whale and simple answers like 'the whale was large or huge' would clearly suffice. The way in which candidates did score one mark was by describing the 'forward movement' of the lorry, but this appeared more often to be the result of a fortuitous piece of copying from the text than a clear vision of the circumstances in which the rescuers found themselves. Candidates who merely said that the whale was moving failed to score because it is the fact that is moving along or forwards which gives rise to the simile of the motorway.
- (b) In order to explain why the whale was struggling to obtain air, candidates needed to look back to earlier in the paragraph, and the simplest answer involved a simple copying from the text at this point: 'because the weight of the shackles kept the head of the whale largely under water'. 'Own word answers were, of course, acceptable as long as the concept of the whale's head being under water was present (for one mark) and there was an idea of what was keeping it there – rope, net chains or anchor (for the second mark). The majority of candidates scored at least one of the marks on offer here.

Question 12

A large number of candidates realised that it was because the whale was weak, or exhausted, after its entanglement that it did not swim away immediately it was freed. Those who chose to answer by quoting from the passage 'the long hours spent enmeshed in a shroud of rope and chains had weakened the animal' earned the mark here as long as they did not go on into the rest of the sentence: 'and it made no reaction when ...'. A minority totally misinterpreted the passage at this point, writing that the whale did not swim away immediately because it wanted to thank those who had rescued it, although it is clear from the text that, by this time, the whale had already swum some distance away.

Passages A and B**Question 13**

The vocabulary question proved a little less testing than last year, with most candidates scoring at least a couple of marks and the most able gaining four or even five. 'Harvesting' and 'pervasiveness' caused the most difficulty while 'harnessing' was handled the most successfully. Common incorrect alternatives offered for 'harvesting' were 'breeding', and 'producing', while the popularity of 'catching' can presumably be explained by the association with 'fishing' in the text. For 'pervasiveness', most candidates were drawn to the idea of quantity – 'large amounts' or 'abundance' – rather than identifying the widespread nature of the problem. 'Harnessing' was often correctly substituted, with 'gathering' being the most popular choice, and, although many rightly identified 'attempt' or 'effort' as a correct alternative for 'bid', those who misunderstand the meaning selected words like 'bet' and 'hope', with 'chance' being the most prevalent incorrect answer.

Many candidates presumably confused 'intently' with 'with intent' and produced answers like 'warily' and 'suspiciously', rather than the 'attentively' or 'closely' which was clearly required.

Passage A

Question 14

As in recent years, the summary was generally well handled, with most candidates scoring a reasonable number of content points, especially from paragraph 2. Most candidates identified that it was over-fishing that had been a major cause of the damage suffered by marine life, and that both whales and smaller fish like haddock had been affected. However, some clearly failed to understand 'more mundane', producing alternatives like 'rare', which clearly denied the mark, and some lost the content point on whales by careless copying – writing that it was the history of whaling which had seriously reduced their numbers. Many squandered precious words by describing the fate of fishing fleets, which was patently a human rather than an ecological problem.

Few understood the point made at the start of the third paragraph, which stated that while over-fishing per se was bad, it was the methods used which caused the greatest harm. However, most candidates went on correctly to describe these methods – drift and purse-seine nets – and the accidental damage which they cause to other marine species. Frequent mention of the ineffective United Nations resolution attempting to ban drift nets was clearly an irrelevance and used up words unnecessarily.

The fourth and fifth paragraphs dealt with the problems of man-made pollution, and most candidates were able to pick up several content points here. However, few understood that it was close to shore that the worst pollution occurred, which was precisely where most wildlife was to be found and many, who failed to read the passage at this point with sufficient care, concluded that it was around the coast of Africa that the problem was at its worst. While a large number of candidates aptly described the fate of individual animals which became entangled in, or ingested, litter, few summed up the damage caused in terms of the vast numbers of species affected annually, like the 30,000 fur seals who die from entanglement alone, and the 100,000 marine animals which are poisoned or suffocated while mistaking discarded objects for food. There was some confusion with the word 'ingestion' itself, with many of the weaker candidates inferring that the animals suffered from indigestion rather than something more serious.

The style mark for the summary produced the usual wide range from candidates, from with the ablest, who produced accurate and elegant summaries which managed to distil the content of the passage into one hundred and fifty of their own words, to the least able who managed to obtain little more than a smattering of content points by copying from the text. It should be noted that however free from error the writing of these candidates may be, they will score very few marks for their use of English.

While the standard of writing was in many cases admirable, a number of candidates had problems with grammar and syntax. A confusion of plural and singular forms of nouns was prevalent and 'litters', 'wastes' and even 'sewages' abounded, even though these words clearly appeared in the singular in the text. Where a singular noun was used in error, there was often a lack of agreement between subject and verb, for example 'massive drift net kill many marine creatures' and, even where the singular form of the noun was correct, it was sometimes followed by a plural form of the verb and pronoun, as in 'rubbish are haphazard as they restrict movements'. Other very common errors took the form of the omission of definite and indefinite articles, for example 'ships in sea release oil with impunity' and 'whales in last century were killed in large numbers'. While spelling was generally correct, commonly mis-spelt words included 'costal', 'accidently' and 'over-exploitating' and the occasional slang term was evident, as in 'humungous' and the whale was like enormous'. Problems with prepositions included 'animals eat plastic, causing death for suffocation' and 'an alarming number of animals die from these ways every year'.