

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/11
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates are advised to ensure they identify the key words in each task to enable them to satisfy the requirements of the question. This is particularly important in **Section 1**, especially when the word **and** in bold type, indicates there are two parts to the bullet point.
- Candidates should manage their time carefully during the exam so as to ensure that they have sufficient time for each question.
- In **Section 1**, candidates should ensure that they use an appropriate format and style for the required text type.
- Candidates are advised not to exceed the maximum number of words in **Section 2**.
- Candidates are advised that the majority of marks in this exam are for language and so they should check that tenses are consistent and be careful with spelling and punctuation.
- Candidates are encouraged to proof-read their work for meaning and accuracy.
- The inclusion of graphic violence and/or sexual content is not appropriate.

General comments

- The vast majority of candidates were fully engaged with the questions and there were very few short or irrelevant responses.
- The strongest responses demonstrated highly accurate writing and a very good understanding of the purpose of each question. Many candidates used a wide range of vocabulary appropriately.
- Tenses and agreement are the main challenge in grammar for many. Other common language errors included confusion between homophones, inaccurate capitalisation and incorrect usage of commas and apostrophes. Candidates should also avoid the use of slang expressions, e.g. 'gonna' or 'wanna'.
- **Section 1** was done well by the large majority of candidates with the bullet points being generally well addressed. Some candidates were less clear about the conventions of speech writing than they are with the conventions of other formats, e.g. letters.
- There were excellent responses to all of the **Section 2** questions. The wide range of options meant that all candidates could find a topic they were interested in writing about. The argument questions were quite popular this year with some detailed arguments.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1: Directed Writing

Question 1

This question required candidates to write a speech about a difficult situation they had been involved in on the way to school. They needed to explain how their best friend had helped them. The purpose and situation were accessible for all candidates as current students. The following points had to be included:

- the name of your friend **and** where the incident happened
- details of the incident and how your friend helped you
- how both you and your friend benefited from the event in different ways.

For **bullet point 1** it was necessary for candidates to name their friend and say where the incident happened. The first part of this bullet point presented no difficulties to the vast majority of candidates who included the name of their friend. Most also achieved the second part of the bullet point by clearly stating where the incident happened, e.g. by giving a street name, explaining that it happened near a particular

place, or by saying that it happened on a bus journey between two named places. Where candidates did not get credit for the second part of the bullet point it was because they were insufficiently clear as to where the incident happened, e.g. by saying only they were on the way to school, or in a car.

For **bullet point 2** candidates had to give details of the incident and say how their friend helped them. A wide variety of difficult situations were described and successful responses described these in detail. The most common included transportation problems such as car crashes or bus breakdowns, bullying incidents, muggings or other crimes, and medical problems. Similarly, the friend provided lots of different types of help, including protecting the candidate from harm, providing a lift, lending money for a bus fare, or giving advice when the candidate was not sure what to do.

Generally, this bullet point was done well with candidates addressing each part in good detail. A few responses used too much of a narrative style approach to this bullet point and turned the speech into a story about what happened and then sometimes neglected the other bullet points. The most effective responses were focused and were clearly written as speeches, rather than stories. A very few responses focused on helping their friend rather than on their friend helping them.

For **bullet point 3** candidates had to explain how they and their friend benefited from the event in different ways. Most candidates recognised the need for there to be different benefits as specified in the bullet point. A wide range of ideas were put forward and the most successful responses described these in good detail. Benefits for the candidate included getting to school on time, realising that they had a friend to rely on and being prevented from getting into trouble. Benefits for the friend included being rewarded by the school, realising what they were capable of and being owed a favour. As with bullet point 2, some candidates wrote only about the benefits to them, rather than including benefits to their friend. In some cases detail was lacking for this bullet point, possibly because the candidates had spent so long on bullet points 1 and 2. The weakest responses sometimes did not include anything specific and commented that they and their friend benefitted without giving any details.

Balance is required in selecting material for Task Fulfilment; a number of responses included overlong introductory paragraphs about the importance of friendship, rather than focusing on one specific incident.

Nearly all candidates understood that they were being asked to write a speech and began with 'Good morning everyone' as requested. Most added other speech conventions, most commonly by thanking the audience for listening at the end. However, in a large number of responses the sense of a speech was not sustained throughout. The most successful responses added other speech features such as the use of rhetorical questions and often included direct address to the audience, e.g. 'you know what I'm like' or 'you won't be surprised to hear'. A few candidates wrote in another format, generally a letter.

There was a good sense of audience in most responses, with candidates understanding that they were being asked to write a speech for their class and using appropriate language for this audience. There was generally appropriate use of formal and informal language, with little inappropriate use of slang. Tone and register were appropriate in almost all responses, with the most successful responses using an effective and engaging style for a speech.

Section 2: Composition

Question 2

Describe two very different places you know where people buy food. The places may be shops, restaurants, markets or any other (Remember you are describing the atmosphere and any people there, as well as the places.)

The description was quite popular with candidates. Buying food was clearly a familiar topic to candidates and most were able to write in some detail. Many candidates wrote about two very different places and described an expensive restaurant and then somewhere cheaper. There were different approaches that could be taken here though and some candidates wrote about two similar places. Most candidates were helped by structuring their response into two sections and very few only wrote about one place to buy food.

The best responses employed the full range of senses to give accounts of their surroundings and made effective use of detail to bring the place they were describing to life. One candidate wrote about market stall holders selling 'edible pieces of heaven' and another wrote about how the conversations of the people were 'therapeutic as they come together with the clinking sounds of the ceramic and porcelain cups and plates'. Vocabulary was often very impressive and included words like 'aesthetically', 'delicately' and 'vibrant.'

Less successful responses relied too much on narrative, describing the events of their day or evening, rather than describing the place to buy food. The language in these compositions was less specific with some repetition of expressions like 'beautiful, 'tasty' and 'amazing.'. The control of tenses was often a weakness in these compositions. The present tense was used well by most but others used the present and past tense inconsistently.

Question 3

'Sport is not just good for exercise – it teaches us lessons about values and behaviour.' Do you think this is true? Give reasons and details to support your view.

This was the most popular of the discursive tasks. Most candidates seemed familiar with the topic and a large majority believed that sport was good for more than exercise. Commonly cited arguments were that sport teaches lessons about teamwork, overcoming adversity and sportsmanship. The best responses made convincing use of detail to support their arguments, with some candidates writing from their own experience and others using real world examples of famous sportspeople. Most candidates also included some arguments against the benefits of sport, for example the fact that it can lead to people becoming too competitive, or that some sportspeople may take drugs to improve their performance.

The most successful candidates produced well-structured pieces, beginning with an introduction and often considering argument and counter argument, before finishing off with a conclusion. These responses also employed some impressive vocabulary including words and phrases like 'motivation,' 'consistency' and 'performance-enhancing.'

Less successful responses struggled to advance a clear argument and sometimes became repetitive and unclear. Candidates need to be able to organise and develop ideas logically in order to do well at this task.

Question 4

'Every generation should move on and forget the beliefs and practices of previous generations.' How far do you agree with this? Give reasons and details to support your views.

This was the least commonly answered of the discursive tasks. Candidates who attempted it often did so effectively and there were strong opinions on both sides as to whether generations should forget the beliefs and practices of previous generations. Candidates who supported the proposition wrote about harmful traditions and the progress that has been made with technology and medicine, compared to previous times. Candidates who opposed the proposition wrote about the importance of learning from the past and about preserving cultural identity. Other responses took a balanced approach, examining the arguments on both sides and opting for a blend of old and new. All of these approaches were acceptable.

As always, candidates who choose the argument essay should ensure they have enough to say. Some candidates ran out of ideas fairly quickly and resorted to repeating points.

Question 5

Write a story which contains the sentence: 'It was important to meet her face to face because what I wanted to say was too important to put in a text message.'

This was the most popular of the **Section 2** tasks. Almost all candidates integrated the given sentence convincingly into the narrative without changing the wording. The sentence could be added at any point in the story and many candidates used it as the precursor to the ending.

Common themes included the candidate finding the courage to share their feelings with a potential girlfriend, having to pass on good or bad news to someone or the need for a face to face conversation to overcome a misunderstanding. There were some very well developed and engaging narratives, often supported by wide and precise vocabulary. These narratives included vivid characters and settings, using features like dialogue to create a sense of immediacy.

Less successful responses tended to struggle to create a sense of character and were sometimes largely a series of events. These responses often relied on simple structures and this could create a monotonous effect.

A few responses included descriptions of sexual activity and this is not appropriate.

Question 6

Write a story about someone who had to look after a younger brother or sister on two occasions – one occasion which went well and one which went badly.

This was another popular choice. Most of the stories described a babysitting scenario, often where reluctant older siblings were left in charge, while their parents went out for dinner, or on a trip away. The first occasion went well and this generally led to a sense of complacency that caused the babysitter to be careless on the second occasion. What went wrong was often the babysitter going out to a friend's house or a party and chaos happening in their house while they were out. The types of things that went wrong included accidents, fires and younger siblings getting lost.

Whatever the story, the best writing contained varied sentence types and lengths, as well as linked paragraphs. The precise use of a wide range of vocabulary also lifted responses and made them more engaging.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/12
Writing

Key messages

- Candidates are advised to respond to the **full** requirements of each bullet point in **Section 1**; often there is a word, such as **and**, in bold type, to indicate two parts to the bullet point.
- In **Section 1**, although candidates are invited to write out their speech, they are advised that the text should represent something spoken and should contain suitable spoken devices.
- Candidates are advised to plan each bullet point in **Section 1** to ensure that they have enough to say which is relevant in each of the bullets.
- In **Section 1**, Bullet 2 often relies on some narrative, but candidates should not introduce too much narrative.
- For both of the Writing tasks it is useful to see in the Mark Scheme band descriptors what is credited and to use it as a guide to effective responses.
- The use of correct tenses and agreement would improve the work of the majority of candidates.
- Correct punctuation (full stops, commas) and a more varied use of punctuation (colons, semi-colons, and exclamation marks) would raise the level of most responses.
- The overuse of the word *like* as in *I was like speaking to my friend...* is best avoided.

General comments

The very best responses demonstrated a good standard in their use of language. For the Task Fulfilment in **Section 1** the vast majority of candidates fulfilled the task in a satisfactory way. As far as the use of language is concerned, candidates need to check their work thoroughly for any errors. In **Section 2**, most of the titles were popular and there was an increase in the number of candidates taking on the Argument and Descriptive titles. Time management for the vast majority was excellent.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1 – Directed Writing

In **Section 1**, candidates were asked to imagine they were on the way home from school with a friend and they saw a poster about an event which led to an exciting experience for both of them. They had to make a speech to their class about the experience. The majority of candidates responded very well to the **purpose** and **situation** as it was a scenario they could easily imagine. Candidates had to be aware that in order to satisfy the requirements of the bullet points a perfect answer required:

- the name of the friend and what kind of event it was
- a detailed account of the experience
- the effect the experience had on the speaker and the friend.

For bullet point 1, successful responses named the friend and the better ones added details about that friend and the nature of the friendship. There were many different events mentioned, showing the wide range of interests among the candidates. There were music concerts and practical music sessions; there were arts and science instruction classes, talent shows and many different sporting opportunities. Most candidates supplied a catchy title for the event, while others mentioned only what kind of event it was. Some of the more unusual and interesting events were beach-cleaning groups (one of which saved a whale), cookery courses and even a competition to find the fastest eater at McDonalds. Most candidates mentioned either the friend or the event and therefore made a solid start to their response.

A few weaker responses relied on lifting (or giving a close paraphrase of) the opening two sentences from the question so that they said they were with a friend, rather than naming the friend; some said they attended an event, rather than specifying or explaining which event they meant. Some responses spent too long on this bullet point saying what they were doing when they came across the poster. A few candidates misunderstood the word *poster* and instead they read it as *post*, as in an internet post, so that it was seen on a computer or phone, rather than in the street. Some saw it as a *postie* or *postman*.

Bullet point 2 was straightforward for the vast majority who included a little narrative to give an account of the event. Concerts often meant detailing the acts and the music and some lucky candidates got to go on stage with their idols. Events which included a practical element saw candidates practise and perfect their skills while sporting events often led to winning a trophy or a medal – as well as meeting a sporting hero.

Less strong responses were unsure about when exactly the event and experience took place. They assumed that seeing the poster was the event and the most they could do to make an experience out of it was to consider the poster itself as a work of art. Some responses went a little further but only as far as buying the tickets in preparation for the event and this resulted in a thin response to the bullet point. Several responses were confused about the timescale and spoke about the event as if it had yet to happen rather than that it had already happened. It was difficult for such responses to give a convincing account of the event and furthermore struggled with bullet point 3 in urging classmates to attend and in saying how they were affected.

Successful responses to bullet point 3 were ones which made a good choice of event to allow them to say enough; going to a pop concert left very little to say as far as the effect was concerned, whereas those who did charity work were much better placed to expand on how the work affected them. All responses referred to enjoying the event and often how they benefitted from it. Strong responses explained more fully exactly how they had benefitted. Such responses were also able to say in what ways they had enjoyed themselves. The strongest responses spoke about how they felt they were improved by participating – including being more confident and less critical of others, especially their parents. Most responses referred to experiencing a joint effect with their friend, but better responses emphasised that both people were affected in different ways as well and so gave fullness to the response.

Generally, there was a very good awareness of **purpose** and **situation** and candidates were very clear about what they were doing in this text. The proper **audience** was the school class but also the teacher. Almost all responses showed awareness of this and some emphasised it by saying that the friend was present in the room. The **tone** and **register** were very well maintained and kept appropriately formal and polite to acknowledge the slightly formal situation and the presence of an adult. Several examples of appropriate technical language were useful in situating the speech in the correct context. However, candidates are advised to avoid overusing colloquialisms such as *you guys*, *gobsmacked* and slang such as *gonna* to make a speech sound spoken. The proper **format** was not always well handled and was the major weakness for many. Although candidates had to write out the speech because it was an exam, they had to recreate the speech *as if it was spoken*. A small number of responses successfully showed that this was a speech. Not only did they use the opening they were invited to use, but they also signed off at the end of the speech with something which was clearly spoken and clearly addressed to the audience. The most successful responses maintained the focus on a speech throughout by using a mixture of rhetorical questions (often challenging the audience to do something similar or urging the friend to take a bow) and appropriate sentence types, questions and exclamations. Less successful responses used the appropriate opening and managed a suitable ending – *thanks for listening* – but did not consistently maintain the focus on a speech. The least successful responses did not include many spoken devices or an appropriate ending.

Candidates understandably followed the structure provided by the bullet points for their organisation, together with a very short opening and closing paragraph. Responses which remained focused did not include too much narrative in response to bullet point 2. Overall, the vast majority of responses included a suitable amount for **Section 1. Opinion** and **justification** arose naturally when the effect was suggested in bullet 3. There were very few short scripts in **Section 1** and even fewer examples of a nil response.

Linguistically, most candidates produced a convincing piece of work. Spelling and punctuation were generally satisfactory. Paragraphing continues to improve in the **Section 1** task. In this text, there was some weakness in the use of tenses when weaker responses switched from paragraph to paragraph. Also, it is worth remembering that *very fun* is not the correct use of the adjective and candidates are advised to avoid using *like* so often – *I was like...* – (even though it is now so common in speech).

Section 2 – Composition

Question 2

Describe two of your neighbours who are very different and what your relationship with them is like. (Remember you are describing the characters of the two people as well as their appearance.)

The descriptive title was a popular choice as the subject of neighbours was accessible to all. The fact that it was two neighbours helped candidates to structure their answers as a contrast; this was usually a good neighbour as opposed to a bad neighbour or male as opposed to female, rich as opposed to poor, pleasant as opposed to unpleasant. Some weaker responses made this contrast too obvious so that every detail about one was contrasted with the detail about the other. – dark hair against light, tall against short, even to the colour of eyes and types of clothes. There was also a tendency in weaker responses to describe only the physical characteristics. The strongest responses referred to aspects of appearance, personality and willingness to help. The very best responses appreciated and applauded the subtle personalities of both neighbours and some very engaging portraits emerged of people and their foibles or eccentricities – people with... *a smile which was not just sunshine but an eclipse...* and someone with... *mascara as thick as my mum's homemade cheese sauce...*

Linguistically, those responses which evoked an atmosphere by close description and the use of adjectives and the senses did well on this topic. The range and precision of the vocabulary used by candidates continues to be excellent: *preferences*, *socially-mobile*, *muscular*, and *acrimonious* were just some of the words used to good effect.

Question 3

'We should always obey rules, both inside and outside school: there is never an excuse for breaking them.' What is your opinion? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was an extremely popular choice. Some candidates appeared to be attracted by the reference to school and the chance to talk about first-hand knowledge, while others were equally tempted by the wider context and rules in society as well as school. There was a very common theme running through the majority of the responses, whether strong or weak. Nearly everyone felt that rules had to be obeyed; this view was very well articulated by a candidate who said that *fairness is distributed to all and mayhem is avoided*. There was one common exception and that was when a loss of life was a possibility. The most frequently quoted example was of jumping a red light when a person needed to get to the hospital. In some responses there was a little too much emphasis on school rules and the wider social context could have been explored a little more. The strongest responses gave interesting personal examples. These arguments benefited greatly from excellent planning with candidates using separate paragraphs to highlight different aspects of the argument.

Question 4

Which two aspects of your culture do you think people in your country should be most proud of? Give reasons and examples to support your view.

This was not a popular choice. Candidates who chose this title gave some excellent evocative snapshots of food, music, art and personal characteristics, as well as emphasising more abstract qualities such as kindness, politeness and tolerance, which they felt exemplified their culture.

Question 5

Write a story which includes the sentence: 'I could see my friend shouting to me but there was too much noise to hear what my friend was saying.'

This was the more popular of the two narrative choices and the most popular question of all the essay choices. The most common noisy venues were a pop concert and a party. Usually the narrator had gone to such an event, often against their will, only to become separated from their friend or suffer some other minor calamity. The friend was seen across the crowded room or public space, but communication was impossible. This inevitably led to confusion and panic, but it was usually resolved. One essay took place in the intensive care ward in a hospital dealing with victims of the pandemic and the candidate realistically captured the difficulties of treatment in the midst of the noise and uncertainty.

The best narrative responses were characterised by an understanding of narrative structures, ambitious vocabulary, the control of tenses and usually by a variation in tone through the selective use of dialogue. Weaker responses tended to repeat ideas, confuse tenses and overuse of simple grammatical forms and vocabulary. Candidates are advised to include more variety in their punctuation and to use it accurately. With specific reference to dialogue, two points are worth remembering here. First, if dialogue is added it should have a purpose – perhaps to show character in some way. Second, dialogue should be correctly punctuated, because it shows a skill as well as making communication clear.

Question 6

Write a story in which someone is accused of doing something wrong which they did not actually do.

This was a less popular choice than **Question 5**. Responses to the title usually involved either shoplifting with the supposed culprit being cleared by the CCTV or cheating in an exam which turned out to be not true. As far as performance was concerned, it was very much the same as for **Question 5**.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

<p>Paper 1123/21 Reading</p>

Key messages

Before answering questions on the reading paper, candidates are advised to read the two texts and questions carefully. This process should help them to understand what is required in answers, and where to find the relevant information. Every question directs them to the paragraph or area of text where they will find the relevant material on which to base their answer. Closer reading of the whole text before answering the questions would help to clarify the narrative described in the second text. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.

- Candidates could be encouraged to underline or highlight key words in the question, e.g. **Question 6(a)** ‘if Quashia had been there... Give two reasons.’
- In all answers candidates are advised to avoid the use of ellipsis (...) to shorten a response. Abbreviating in this way increases the risk of information essential to an answer being omitted. They should also avoid using brackets (which are read as part of the point being made), slashes or punctuation, such as the colon, to present examples. Adding additional information in these ways risks confusing a main point. This is most evident in **Question 1(a)**.
- Candidates are advised for **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** to focus on identifying the key overarching points from the text without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points. If candidates feel they must include an example, they should ensure that they make this clear, using ‘for example’, ‘such as’ etc.
- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**; if they choose to, they need to be aware that when substituting a word or phrase, it must mean the same as the original. While candidates should write succinctly and avoid copying lengthy sentences, they should also be aware that brevity can exclude key information. Simply writing ‘essential nutmeg oil’ does not convey its *use*, for example.
- The nature of a summary is the selection of the main points from a given passage. Most candidates avoided lengthy or unnecessary introductions and conclusions in **Question 1(b)**. When moving from the origins and spread of nutmeg to its modern use, a simple ‘Nowadays’ would suffice to make clear this transition.
- In **Question 1(b)**, there should be focus on clear expression; this will ensure a piece of writing that is easy to follow. Candidates should be aware that accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)** can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- For **Question 1(b)**, candidates can use the question to help structure the response in two halves: for example, the origins and spread of nutmeg, and its uses in modern times. The wording of the question encourages a chronological structure.
- In **Question 1(b)**, candidates are advised to use appropriate linking devices to establish coherence; words and phrases which are not standard English, such as ‘moreso’ and ‘to add on’, are best avoided. Many candidates would benefit from further practice using these devices in their summaries.

- Candidates are encouraged to practise recognising the difference between factual and non-factual statements in the non-fiction passage for **Question 2**. This question asks for non-factual statements, in this case opinions, given in the text *by the writer*. An opinion may form only part of the sentence and should be offered without the inclusion of additional information which might turn it into a statement.
- In the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates should be encouraged to look at the given words in the context in which they appear in the text.
- Candidates often experience difficulties with questions in which they are required to answer in their own words. This was seen particularly in capturing the idea of ‘incomprehensible misgivings’ in **Question 6(c)**. This type of question will always give a quotation from the passage which contains the ideas candidates have to explain. They are advised to pay close attention to where this phrase or sentence occurs in the context of the passage. This approach will help them to produce responses with a clearer focus.
- In **Question 10**, candidates are expected to make a clear distinction between the ‘Meaning’ and the ‘Effect’ of the given phrases. Further practice in the approach to these questions on the writer’s craft will be beneficial and candidates are advised to focus on the straightforward, literal meaning under ‘Meaning’ and to differentiate between that and the ‘Effect’ of the *writer’s use* of particular words or images.

General comments

Candidates answer questions based on two passages of around 700 words each, the first being non-fiction and the second being fiction, with answers written in a common answer booklet. Both passages, the first entitled ‘*Nutmeg*’ and the second entitled ‘*Tending The Olive Trees*’, were generally accessible to all. Incomplete scripts were rare, with the occasional omission of **Question 3(b)** and **Questions 10(a)** and **10(b)**. All candidates seemed to engage with the tasks and the texts.

In **Question 1(a)** a few candidates wrote part of their responses at the side or at the bottom of the page. If a response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number, part and, if appropriate, the section which is being continued. This is particularly important for **Question 1(a)**.

In **Question 1(a)**, there were only a few instances of candidates putting information in the wrong section. In **Question 2**, a small number of candidates referred to the fiction passage.

The first passage explored the candidates’ ability to read for ideas and the second tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary question, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates’ ability to select content points from the text of ‘*Nutmeg*’ and 10 marks for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**, although some scripts which were in excess of the recommended length became too wordy under Relevance and less fluent under Coherence.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they may find it useful to use bullet points for their notes, and that they do *not* need to use their own words.

In **Question 1(b)**, credit is given for organised information presented in an easy to follow manner, using own words as far as possible. The strongest responses rephrased and synthesised their content points fluently and coherently. Acceptable responses selected parts of the original passage, rearranging and adding to them, to ensure a coherence of their own.

A further question, **Question 2** with 3 marks, tested candidates’ ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion in three of the six paragraphs of the text.

The second passage, ‘*Tending The Olive Trees*’, tested the candidates’ literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer’s craft. While the majority of candidates attempted every question, there were a small number who did not. The remaining 25 marks for the paper could be gained here.

Both spelling and punctuation were generally good throughout.

Comments on specific questions:

Section 1

Question 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify the origins and spread of nutmeg in former times, and the uses of nutmeg in modern times, as outlined in the passage. The summary was based on the whole text, and candidates were asked to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark. The exercise was a discriminating one as almost the whole range of marks could be found. Stronger responses identified all 12 points. In weaker responses, sometimes the points listed were unacknowledged or unnecessary extensions of the main points and this irrelevance was carried forward into **Question 1(b)**. As a result, these responses produced less relevant summaries but the selected points were sometimes organised quite well. The strongest responses identified main points and avoided extraneous detail, such as traces of pottery or the historical political situations. Weaker responses omitted key words, repeated points or listed individual health benefits rather than encompassing all as 'medical benefits'. There was more success in identifying the origins and spread of nutmeg than its uses in modern times. In both parts it was necessary to avoid anything which was an example or extension of a main point, while at the same time ensuring that words essential to making that point completely were included. Examples of such expressions are given in dealing with individual points, below.

Excluding the given content points, which were not rewarded with marks, there were 15 content points, of which candidates could identify any combination and gaining a maximum of 12 marks. Most candidates expressed the points in note form or in short sentences lifted from the text. Those few who presented long, verbatim copies of the text sometimes ran out of space and stopped short of covering a number of points. The best responses were expressed concisely, almost always in bullet points.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described the origins and spread of nutmeg and there were 7 points (excluding the first, which was given) which the candidates could make. With all these points, as it was an account of the historical movement of nutmeg by various people, it was important to include who did what and where; stronger responses included these details.

Many responses offered the traces of nutmeg found on a fragment of pottery as their first point from Paragraph 1, but this did not answer the question, showing neither the origins nor the spread of nutmeg. The first correct point was that Arab traders sold nutmeg / it to the Venetians, which most candidates identified successfully. There was no need to include details of the Arabs keeping the source a secret, nor that this kept prices high, as this was irrelevant to the question.

Paragraph 2 contained 5 content points covering the spread of nutmeg. The first was that 'Portuguese sailors found the source (of nutmeg)'. Many candidates unnecessarily described how the recruiting of sailors from Malacca achieved this. It was important that it was the Portuguese who discovered the source, as this caused nutmeg to spread, not that the Malaccan sailors had known before where to find it. The second point involved the Portuguese then selling the nutmeg *more widely* in Europe. The more successful candidates saw the importance of the nutmeg being sold in many parts of Europe, not just in Venice. Reference to who did the selling and where they did it was needed to completely express the point. Candidates correctly noted that '*the Portuguese* discovered the source (of nutmeg)', but then, in the subsequent bullet point, some candidates wrote only 'took back to sell widely in Europe', which lacked focus on who did the selling. The most able candidates succinctly combined the two ideas in one bullet point: '*the Portuguese* discovered the source (of nutmeg) *and* took it back to sell widely in Europe'. The next point required the information that nutmeg became a 'prized spice' or 'a symbol of wealth' in European societies or simply in Europe, the qualification of place being needed to show why the Europeans were so keen to purchase nutmeg. The next point dealt with the consequence of this interest by Europeans: 'the Dutch took control of nutmeg *production*' or the Dutch established a (nutmeg) 'trading *system*', as they took charge of the supply and movement of nutmeg. The final point in the paragraph that it was a 'convenient product to trade', or that it was 'small, easily transported *and* durable', was slightly different as it did not follow the format of a group of people trading or transporting nutmeg, which may explain why fewer candidates identified this point.

Paragraph 3 provided 1 further point. Most candidates were able to identify that the British transported nutmeg *trees* to Sri Lanka, Penang and Singapore, or that the British took nutmeg *production* to Sri Lanka, Penang and Singapore. It was important to identify the countries where the trees were transported to clearly explain the spread of nutmeg, rather than a general reference to other countries.

The second section of the summary asked for the uses of nutmeg in modern times, with 9 further points, the first being given. Paragraph 4 provided the given point, that nutmeg is used in savoury dishes, and 2 others. The second point required the identification of 'sweet dishes' or 'desserts' as a modern use of nutmeg. Responses which also provided examples of countries given in the passage needed the inclusion of 'like', 'such as' or 'for example', etc. to demonstrate that the candidate identified them as an example, to gain the mark. The next point required the identification of 'drinks' as a use of nutmeg, again without the examples of rum punch or mulled wine.

Paragraph 5 had 2 further points, the first being 'mace', a product of the nutmeg seed. The point did not require any further information, but many candidates gave the additional correct detail that mace comes from the seed covering. Successful responses avoided continuing on to the opinion that mace is preferable to nutmeg or stating that it enhances the appearance of the dish. The last point in the paragraph involved identifying that 'essential nutmeg oil' is used or 'sometimes preferred in cooking'. Stronger responses recognised the need to explain how the nutmeg oil is used.

The final paragraph, Paragraph 6, provided the last 4 points and was the area of the passage which candidates found the most challenging in terms of distinguishing between examples of uses of nutmeg and the main points. The first point came either from nutmeg being used 'in the industrial world', or explaining its use in more detail 'as an *industrial* lubricant', with the *industrial* context being key. Successful responses then identified the use of nutmeg to 'enhance' or 'improve' 'appearance *and* well-being', which encompassed the examples in the following 3 lines of the text: the paste of nutmeg and honey, and cosmetics and perfumes which could not be credited alone. Many responses identified the use of nutmeg in 'toothpaste' as an overarching point with the added detail of removing toxins and preventing bad breath as an unnecessary, but correct, explanation of why it would be used, before moving on to the more specific 'medical benefits' of nutmeg. Only a small minority of responses correctly gave this final overarching point; others focused on the numerous examples in the passage: curing the plague or insomnia, aiding digestion, reducing depression and helping concentration. Many incorrectly saw these as key uses, when acknowledging them as examples, with the addition of 'such as', 'like', etc. of the all-embracing *in medicine*, would have gained the mark.

In **Question 1(b)** candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary of the origins and spread of nutmeg in former times, and the uses of nutmeg in modern times, as outlined in the passage. They were advised to write 150–180 words (the first ten of which were given) and to use their own words as far as possible in a piece of continuous writing. Marks are awarded for producing a relevant, well organised and easy to follow summary.

The strongest responses expanded the relevant notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising the material without including repetition, examples, or supporting detail. They also avoided non-specific topic sentences, such as 'the uses of nutmeg in modern times' or writing a conclusion. The best responses demonstrated coherence using a range of skilful and accurate linking devices, including the effective use of punctuation and adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore', 'in addition', 'moreover', positioning them correctly within a sentence. Good responses correctly recognised that the passage did not have a 'for' and 'against' structure, thus negating the use of connectives such as 'on the other hand', 'nevertheless'. Other responses relied accurately but somewhat repetitively on 'and' or 'also' as links, with an occasional suitable adverb link; such responses were satisfactory in terms of their fluency. Weaker responses attempted to synthesise sections of the text using only commas, or chose inappropriately from a memorised list of connectives and were, therefore, less able to demonstrate a skilful level of fluency. There were very few cases of incoherent writing.

The relevance of some responses was limited by copying extended sections of the passage. More successful use of the text avoided unimportant detail and examples, such as the inclusion of the warning that nutmeg should be taken in moderation, as this did not fulfil the requirements of the rubric. Stronger responses used their key points from **Question 1(a)** to include many of the overarching points from the passage. All but one or two candidates attempted this question, most completing the task to an appropriate length.

Question 2

In **Question 2**, which continued to test 'Reading for Ideas', candidates were asked to re-read Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 and to give one opinion from each. A mark was awarded for the identification of each opinion,

whether copied directly from the passage or presented in the candidate's own words. In this question, candidates need to separate factual information from opinion as presented by the writer. The key to answering this type of question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective, and in this case the words were 'delicious' for the first opinion, 'preferable' or 'delicate' for the second opinion and 'definitely' for the third.

The opinion in Paragraph 4 was that '(a pinch of) nutmeg added to rice pudding is delicious'. A majority of candidates correctly identified this opinion.

In Paragraph 5, the opinion was that 'mace is preferable to nutmeg', with the additional, but unnecessary, detail that it has 'a saffron-like hue to enhance the appearance of the dish'. The key word which distinguished this as opinion was 'preferable'. This is in contrast to the phrase 'sometimes preferred' later in the paragraph, which allows for some people to prefer the use of essential nutmeg oil, perhaps in some dishes. An alternative acceptable opinion in this paragraph, that 'mace ... has a more delicate flavour', required some careful rewriting to avoid the inclusion of '*the seed covering gives us (mace)*', which is a fact, not an opinion. Candidates are advised to read what they have written to ensure it makes sense and it gives the whole opinion rather than writing, for example, 'which has a more delicate flavour'.

In Paragraph 6, the opinion was 'a paste made with nutmeg and honey applied to the face definitely produces a clear / beautiful complexion'. The key lay in discerning the subjectivity inherent in the word 'definitely'. Candidates were not required to write the whole quotation, but did need to include 'nutmeg *and* honey', plus that they made *either* 'a paste', *or* that they 'were applied to the face' to 'definitely' improve the complexion.

A few candidates did not attempt this question. Candidates are advised that opinions must be taken from the given paragraph in the passage rather than their own opinions, as in responses such as: '*In paragraph 4 they say nutmeg is a good ingredient in cooking food and I think this is true.*' Candidates should also avoid giving a summary of the paragraph content as an 'opinion', e.g. '*Nutmeg has very many uses which is why it is such an important spice and in such demand.*'

Section 2

In dealing with a narrative text, candidates will often encounter less familiar vocabulary and will have to show an understanding of figurative language and inferred as well as literal meaning.

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question asking how we can tell that the summer was likely to be a particularly hot one, the answer being either that *every* plant was wilting or that *every* plant needed watering daily. Most chose the former, and some gave both. What distinguished correct responses was the recognition that it needed to be 'every plant' or '*all* the plants' to show the extent of the heat, rather than just 'plants', which could have been only a few. Candidates could answer in their own words or by quoting the passage.

Question 3(b) was the first of two questions which required candidates to link one quotation with another. They had to give the phrase used later in the paragraph which conveyed an opposite idea to the husband's arrangement being 'long-standing'. Careful reading of the question was required to avoid other references to the husband in the paragraph, as the correct quotation was in relation to Quashia, the farm worker, who announced 'out of the blue' that he had to be elsewhere. The question asked for the *opposite* idea, not a continuation, ruling out 'I felt sadness at his departure' and 'he had business to attend to elsewhere'. The quotation itself, 'out of the blue', was very precise and successful responses focused only on that phrase.

Question 4

In **Question 4(a)**, was another literal comprehension question which asked why the writer phoned Rene for help. The answer lay in the first lines of Paragraph 2, lines 6-7: 'a fungal infection was spreading wildly through the olive trees' which a majority of candidates identified. A key part of the response was where the infection was, in the (olive) trees, to show why she called Rene in particular and not someone else. Nearly all candidates who used the words of the text avoided the occasional reference to 'a fungus', which is not the same thing as a 'fungal infection'.

Question 4(b) had 2 parts, asking what approach to treating the trees Rene recommended and the writer's preference. This literal comprehension question was answered well by the vast majority of candidates, who offered either 'using chemicals' or 'spraying' as Rene's choice in contrast to the writer wanting an 'organic' approach or a more 'natural' cure. The only issues involved either confusing the 2 people or looking forward to the following paragraph and talking of fly traps when the question directed them to Paragraph 2.

Question 5

Question 5(a) was the first to require the use of candidates' own words. They were given the phrase 'jeopardise our status as olive farmers' within the context of the infected trees. They were asked to explain in their own words what the writer fears could happen. It was necessary, as is usual in an 'own words' question, to identify the key ideas to be found in the quotation; those ideas lay in the words 'jeopardise' and 'status', which suggested her fears. Almost all candidates realised that their response had to be in this context. The most successful picked out the 2 key words and explained what the writer was afraid would happen in their own words, the most succinct being that the infection would 'ruin their reputation'. This is another question where careful reading reaped rewards, allowing candidates to focus on the key words rather than the more general 'explain what the writer fears would happen', which caused some to comment on the infected trees and the olives dying. Candidates are advised to note that, as there are 2 marks available, there will be 2 separate ideas to convey, both of which need re-phrasing. Although many successfully picked up the idea of loss (of status) for 'jeopardise', a common incorrect response for 'status' focused on the business, losing money or the olives dying.

Question 5(b) required candidates to infer Rene's emotion suggested by the phrase 'Rene had an edge to his voice'. Some recognised the reference to his 'impatience' from the previous paragraph, which was still appropriate; others were able to put themselves in Rene's position and correctly identified that he would be 'frustrated', 'annoyed', 'irritated', or more often 'angry'. Common misconceptions had Rene 'worried', when this did not fit the context of it being the writer's farm, not his, or 'confident', which did not clearly explain 'an edge to his voice'. An appropriate register was used by a large majority of candidates. Candidates are advised that slang or inappropriate vocabulary is not acceptable.

Question 5(c) was the second of the questions which required candidates to link one quotation, 'Trust my experience', with another earlier in the paragraph which showed that Rene knows what he is talking about. Key words in the rubric were *sentence* and *earlier* which successful responses identified as 'Any farmer will back me up on this.' in line 16. A significant number of candidates responded with 'It's not efficient' or, more often, 'Ninety percent of the olives...', often added to the correct sentence, meaning it was unclear whether or not they had understood which sentence was answering the question and the mark could not be awarded.

Question 6

Question 6(a) was another inferential question which asked candidates why it was 'understandable' that, if Quashia had been there, he would have done most of the work? For the 2 marks they needed to give 2 different reasons. Candidates who answered this well responded clearly to the mention of Quashia in the question. Many recalled the previous mention that Quashia was the farm worker, a legitimate reason for him doing most of the work. We are told in the first line of the paragraph that 'he was seventy-six years old', which was a correct response provided that candidates made sure to name Rene as the subject of the sentence, otherwise it sounded as though Quashia was seventy-six, as his is the only name in the question. It is possible to infer that Quashia is *younger* from this information, another valid answer, although we cannot say that Quashia is 'young', as we are not told his age in the passage. We can also infer that Quashia is 'strong' from line 22 which tells us that 'nobody strong enough was available', including Quashia, but this quotation alone was not enough, as it does not answer the question.

Question 6(b) required candidates to look back in the paragraph to explain why the writer offered to be Rene's assistant, apart from the fact that Quashia was not there to help. The simplest response came from lines 24–25: 'Rene reiterated that he could not accomplish the job alone'. A more sophisticated response referred to the earlier mention that Rene had suggested bringing 'one of his friends' but they were not 'available; they had all committed themselves elsewhere'. Some confused the writer's offer with the response to **Question 6(c)**, which talked about Rene thinking this was no job for a female, so suggested she offered to help deliberately to challenge him, but there is no evidence in the passage for this.

Question 6(c) was the second question requiring candidates to answer in their own words and they found this question more challenging than the first, with only a minority of candidates scoring 2 marks. Candidates had to explain in their own words what Rene's reaction was when the writer suggested she could be his assistant, with reference to the words 'he muttered *incomprehensible misgivings*'. Correct answers were

responses such as '(words which were) not understandable' or 'were unfathomable' or 'did not make sense' for 'incomprehensible', and 'doubts' or 'reservations' or '(he was) uncertain' for 'misgivings'. Some of the more successful responses considered the next few lines of the passage and identified the idea that Rene thought or believed that this was no job for a woman or that women were not strong enough to do the job, which were both acceptable answers for 'misgivings'. 'Mumbled' was accepted for 'incomprehensible', as it can indicate speech which is unclear. Many candidates focused on the verb 'muttered', which was outside the inverted commas, so not one of the key ideas to explain. Some looked back in the paragraph, which is often a useful strategy, and picked out the word 'guffaw' in the previous line but which in this case did not explain the given words.

Question 7

Question 7 was another literal comprehension question which asked candidates why they had to take the hosepipe on foot. The answer came from lines 33–34, which could be lifted: 'As there were no accessible driving routes', with the additional detail, 'in the terraced olive grove, it was necessary to walk, and haul the hosepipe', being acceptable but not required. A majority of candidates answered correctly, while others gave details of the 'writer's job' in the spraying operation, which was to keep the hosepipe flexible and uncurred.

Question 8

Question 8 required candidates to explain the meaning of a metaphor in relation to a previous piece of information. Part inferential, but also part literal, candidates had to look back to the previous line to answer why they thought Rene 'stood no taller than a matchstick'. The previous line tells us that the tree was 'a tall, gnarled old olive tree' which could be lifted, although the addition of 'staring up into' confused the response so was not credited. Candidates had to explain that the tree was tall, but many chose to speculate on whether Rene was small, which we are never told, or to state that he was smaller than the tree, which did not capture the height of the tree. A common incorrect response was 'because the machine started to make disgusting slurping noises' or that it was because of the distance from the writer, ignoring the fact that the tree was also the same distance away.

Question 9

Question 9 was the multiple-choice synonym question where understanding of five words from the text was tested. The best responses were those where candidates selected the most appropriate synonym for the original by taking each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and comparing them. Such checking in the context is all-important with this type of question as some of the possible choices have quite different meanings when used in different circumstances. The clearest method of indicating the chosen word is by circling the correct letter at which it appears. If candidates change their mind, they are advised to clearly indicate which response should be considered and which ignored.

The most successful attempts were **Question 9(d)** and **Question 9(e)** with 'suggestion' being recognised as the closest meaning to 'hint', and 'reduced' for 'restricted' by many candidates. Less successful were **Question 9(b)** where the word 'slowly' was often incorrectly chosen for 'solemnly' instead of 'seriously', and **Question 9(c)** where many candidates incorrectly chose 'explained' for 'reiterated' rather than 'repeated'. The most challenging word was **Question 9(a)** where only the strongest candidates realised that, in the context of the passage, 'innocent' was the more appropriate adjective to describe how the writer might describe her approach to farming in Rene's opinion. Many candidates chose 'silly' or 'wrong', which perhaps would be Rene's opinion, but not how the writer would describe herself.

Question 10

This was the section dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft and nearly all candidates answered these more challenging questions. In both **Question 10(a)** and **Question 10(b)**, candidates were asked to give, first, the meaning of a sentence as used in the passage, and then to give the effect of that sentence. As mentioned before in 'Key Messages', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question. Too often candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa. Meanings were answered well but correct effects were rarely given. Explanations of the effect needed to focus on the language choice in the quote and not the wider literal context of the narrative and candidates found this challenging.

Question 10(a) directed candidates to line 1: 'at a galloping pace'. Most candidates correctly identified synonyms for speed with 'fast(er)' or 'quickly'. Whilst 'high speed' or 'high pace' successfully conveyed the

sense of speed, just writing 'high' was too ambiguous. Some incorrect responses referred to summer arriving early, based on all the plants wilting.

For the effect of the phrase, a small number of successful responses recognised that summer's arrival was unexpected, people were unprepared or they had no time left to prepare. Other acceptable responses were that summer was uncontrollable and its approach was threatening. Many candidates looked at the passage as a whole and explained how the speed of summer arriving affected the olives or the farm in general and what needed to be done, but these answers were incorrect.

For **Question 10(b)**, the given phrase was from line 12: 'olive trees are prey to flies'. As with **Question 10(a)**, there was more success with the meaning. Many candidates successfully stated that flies 'feed on' or 'eat the trees' or olives. 'Attack' was also an acceptable verb in 'the flies attack the olive trees'. Some incorrect responses offered the idea that the olives '*attract*' flies, but this did not capture the image of the olives as 'prey'. A few responses suggested that this made the olives 'vulnerable', which is the effect of the language, not a literal meaning.

Candidates found explaining the effect very challenging. Although a few responses scored with 'the flies are vicious' or 'the olives are defenceless', many responses discussed the effect on the writer and her farm – how badly the farm would do if the olives died or the necessity to treat the infection – which was incorrect. As in **Question 10(a)**, greater focus on the impact of the individual words, rather than considering them in the wider context of the passage, may help candidates see beyond the literal and identify what idea or feeling the writer wants to suggest.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Paper 1123/22
Reading

Key messages

- Candidates should try to gain a good, overall picture of both the given texts *and* all questions through close reading before they begin to answer each section. In both sections of the Paper, close reading and careful attention to detail were the attributes which brought the best results.
- Candidates might find it helpful to underline or highlight key words in the question, e.g. **Question 6(a)** 'How did the men show their anger?', or in **Question 6(c)** 'Give one other word...'. This will ensure the answers are focused and creditworthy.
- Candidates are advised for **Question 1(a)** and **Question 1(b)** to focus on identifying, specifically, the main overarching points from the text without the unnecessary inclusion of examples, repetition and extensions of those points.
- If examples are included in **Question 1(a)**, candidates need to identify them as such with the use of 'for example', 'such as' or 'like'. The use of brackets, dashes and slashes is to be avoided and they are not indicators of examples, nor is punctuation such as the colon, comma or semi-colon.
- Candidates do not have to use their own words in **Question 1(a)**; however, they should be aware that when substituting a word or phrase, it must be appropriate. While candidates need to be encouraged to write succinctly and also to avoid copying lengthy sentences, they must also be aware that brevity can exclude key information, e.g. 'governments solve production problems' misses the key word 'legislate'.
- In **Question 1(a)**, it is not necessary for candidates to restrict themselves to a maximum of 12 content points. They can, in fact, offer more than 12 points and each one will all be considered on merit, even though the maximum number of marks is 12.
- In **Question 1(b)**, the focus is on clear expression; this will ensure a well organised piece of writing that is easy to follow. Candidates should use the question to help structure the response in two halves: the importance of rice from ancient times to modern day *and* reasons for its continuing popularity.
- Candidates are encouraged to write to the recommended length in **Question 1(b)**; overlong or short responses are self-penalising since they cannot satisfactorily fulfil the criteria for Relevance or Coherence.
- For **Question 1(b)**, candidates demonstrated an awareness of the importance of linking devices to establish coherence; it is essential that these are appropriate and also used selectively. Words and phrases which are not standard English, such as 'moreso' and 'to add on', are best avoided. Many candidates would benefit from further practice using these devices to enable them to move from writing a competent summary to writing a summary which is skilful or even impressive.
- Candidates should be aware that accurate punctuation in **Question 1(b)**, particularly the accurate use of commas and full stops, can assist in the fluent and coherent presentation of content points.
- Candidates' performance on **Question 2** shows some improvement, but many responses demonstrated a difficulty in distinguishing between factual and non-factual statements, such as opinions, in the non-fiction passage. The opinion might be only part of the sentence and should be written without the inclusion of additional factual information. It needs to be reinforced that **Question 2** relates to Passage 1, not Passage 2. Candidates are advised to copy the opinion as it is given in the passage since own word attempts can miss some detail or include inappropriate alternatives.

- In the own word questions, candidates can improve if they avoid repeating the key words in their response, and instead provide suitable synonyms which work within the given context.
- In **Question 9**, the multiple-choice vocabulary question, candidates should be encouraged to try out each of the possible words and decide which is the most appropriate in the passage with which they are dealing. Candidates are asked to circle the correct letter. Occasionally other methods such as eliminating the incorrect answers or writing the letter in the margin resulted in ambiguous responses which could not be credited.
- In responding to the final question on the writer's craft, understanding of both literal and inferential writing is required. It was not always evident that candidates could distinguish between *meaning* and *effect*. Further practice on the approach to these questions on the writer's craft would be beneficial. Candidates are advised to provide a straightforward literal meaning under 'Meaning' and for 'Effect' to go beyond the literal and comment on the impact or connotations of particular words or an image.

General comments

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two passages, each of approximately 700 words: the first entitled '*Rice*' and the second entitled '*Pedro*'.

Although the majority of candidates attempted every question, there was a small number who made no attempt at some of the questions in Section 2, particularly **Question 10**.

Responses were, for the most part, clearly written. A few candidates who wrote to excess – in **Question 1(a)** particularly – wrote at the side or at the bottom of the page which can result in illegible responses and this should be avoided. If the response needs to continue on additional pages, candidates should ensure that they identify the original question number, part and, if appropriate, the section which is being continued. This is particularly important for **Question 1(a)**.

In **Question 1(a)**, there were a few instances of candidates putting information in the wrong section. In **Question 2**, a small number of candidates referred to the fiction passage.

The first non-fiction passage explored the candidates' ability to read for ideas and the second fiction passage tested their reading for meaning. 22 marks were available for the summary **Question 1**, with 12 of these marks being awarded for the assessment of the candidates' ability to select content points from the passage, '*Rice*'. 10 marks were awarded for the assessment of their ability to express these points in a piece of writing which was relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Almost all candidates wrote to the required length in **Question 1(b)**.

In **Question 1(a)**, the majority of candidates wisely adhered to the suggestion in the rubric that they might find it useful to use bullet points for their notes.

A further question, **Question 2**, allotted 3 marks to the testing of the candidates' ability to read for ideas, in this case to distinguish fact from opinion in two different paragraphs of the text.

The second passage, '*Pedro*', tested the candidates' literal and inferential comprehension, their understanding of vocabulary, their ability to select appropriate quotations, their use of own words and their appreciation of the writer's craft. The remaining 25 marks for the Paper could be gained here. There was a range of questions, some of which everyone was able to deal with and other more challenging questions, which stretched the candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Section 1

Question 1

Question 1(a) was the first part of the summary question, carrying 12 marks. Candidates were asked to identify and write down the importance of rice from ancient times to the present day, and the reasons for its continuing popularity, as outlined in the passage. The summary was to be based on the whole text, and candidates were to write their answers in note form, where they were free to use either the words of the text or their own words. One content point under each heading of the rubric was given by way of illustration, although these given points were not rewarded with a mark.

Excluding these given points, there were 13 content points. The exercise was a discriminating one as a wide range of marks were observed. Few candidates achieved over ten marks and only a small number gave the maximum number of correct points. These successful responses were expressed concisely, using the suggested bullet points and avoiding repetition, unnecessary examples and additional information, ensuring that key words essential to making that point were included.

Less successful responses did not select the overarching point from the details in the passage and offered irrelevant material, notably the inclusion of examples and repetition. Examples of such are given in dealing with the individual points below.

Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 described reasons for the importance of rice from ancient times to the present and, apart from the first given point, there were six content points which the candidates could make.

Paragraph 1 contained one content point that described the spread of rice as evidence of its importance. It could be expressed concisely with rice 'quickly spread' or alternatively by stating that 'it was transported to other countries'. If any country in this paragraph was mentioned, it had to be introduced with 'like', 'such as' or 'for example'. Many responses did not include this point or were focused on the recovery of grains in Iran or the Po valley which could not score as these are examples. 'Rice was so widespread' also was not creditworthy since it just describes the consequences of the global spread of rice.

Paragraph 2 contained two content points which focused on the cultural and religious significance of rice. The first point was that rice was used in 'celebrations', 'ceremonies' or 'special occasions' and many candidates correctly quoted the words from the passage: 'used to mark celebrations'. Several candidates went on to provide additional detail about harvest festivals, good luck and weddings and, unless they were presented as examples with 'for example' or 'such as', the point could not be credited. The examples of harvest festivals and weddings were often incorrectly presented as separate bullet points. The second content point was the link with religion. Although there was reasonable success by lifting 'links between rice and religious belief', any reference to Islamic texts and rice goddesses was not acceptable unless it was identified as an example.

In Paragraph 3, there were three further content points about the importance of rice as a staple food. There were three ways in which the first point could be made and although most candidates were successful in identifying the point, it was not unusual for it to be repeated, resulting in candidates unnecessarily using up lines on the page. In addition to the single word 'food', creditworthy responses could identify that it is a 'staple food' or that rice 'provides a fifth of calories people consume'. However, 'rice is the staple food of the country' could not score since it is referring specifically to Indonesia. The second point in this paragraph was to identify a government's role in legislating or passing laws to solve production problems. Where candidates failed to make this point fully, it was often due to the omission of 'legislate', instead referring to road building which is an example of action taken. The final point could be answered in two ways: the 'United Nations' declared an 'International Year of Rice', or rice 'alleviates global poverty and malnutrition'. Both alternatives required recognition of the global element and many candidates were successful in recognising this.

In the second section of the summary, the rubric asked for the reasons for the continuing popularity of rice as outlined in the passage, and there were a further seven content points, excluding the given point, to be found in Paragraphs 4, 5 and 6.

From Paragraph 4, candidates could make two points about rice in our daily diet, the first being that rice has a 'variety of food uses'. The inclusion of 'food' was essential to differentiate it from the other uses it has. Rice can be cooked in many ways or rice can make a range of meals were acceptable alternatives. While responses could include general reference to the three main cooking types, any additional information about

the cooking of the rice grains was incorrect. The second point was that rice is 'healthy', wholesome or nutritious and was often succinctly given with the acceptable lift 'rice is a healthy option'. Additional information about the health benefits of white and brown rice was not acceptable since these are examples. Several candidates offered 'It is impossible to become bored with eating rice' which was not creditworthy because it is simply an extension of rice's varied flavours and food uses, rather than a distinct point.

Paragraph 5 contained three points about the production of rice and many candidates were able to identify at least two of these points. The first point was that growing rice is 'an inexpensive way to obtain food' with the focus on rice-growing being cheap or economical. 'Rice is cheap' without the context of growing or cultivating could imply cheap to purchase which is not correct. The second point was that rice 'can be harvested for many seasons' or alternatively 'ratooning can produce a crop for up to thirty years', but it was not enough to simply describe the traditional method of growing rice. The final point that rice 'can be grown almost anywhere' was often successfully made, but could only be credited with the inclusion of the adverb 'almost' or similar, while 'rice can be grown anywhere as long as the temperature is high' is not entirely true so was not correct.

The final paragraph, Paragraph 6, contained two content points about alternative uses of rice. Many candidates found it difficult to select the overarching points in this paragraph and gave points which were examples alone: hulls can be used as fuel or powdered rice can cure skin ailments. Candidates were required to identify that a reason for rice's continuing popularity is its by-products. Reference to rice straw, hulls and rice oil was only acceptable if they were identified as examples with the inclusion of 'such as' or 'for example'. Strong responses showed evidence of candidates having read beyond the list of by-products to the point in the paragraph where the overarching point is clearly made: 'useful by-products.' Similarly, the second point in this paragraph that rice has medical benefits could not score if the examples were presented as if they were the overarching point. However, since the overarching point preceded the examples in the paragraph, there was much more success in identifying its 'medical properties'. It was not uncommon for this section to close with one or more examples of rice's medical uses which were not creditworthy.

In **Question 1(b)**, candidates were asked to use their notes to write a summary of the importance of rice from ancient times to the present day, and the reasons for the continuing popularity of rice. They were advised to write between 150-180 words (the first ten of which were given) in a piece of continuous writing which was to be relevant, well organised and easy to follow. Most candidates wrote to the required length. A small minority of candidates relied too heavily on the original passage instead of their notes, giving a summary which was close to verbatim.

Candidates who scored highly in **Question 1(a)** were often able to transform their notes into a relevant summary which did not rely on excessive copying of the text. The most impressive efforts were from candidates who expanded the relevant notes made in **Question 1(a)**, synthesising the material without repetition, examples and the overuse of unnecessary supporting detail. The strongest responses included only what was relevant and excluded unnecessary examples and additional details. These responses were balanced, giving equal consideration to both parts of the question. Candidates who relied on copying sections of the text included a lot of irrelevance such as details about specific ceremonies as well as references to the specific by-products and their uses.

Although the use of own words is not compulsory, those who did use them, together with some of their own constructions to link the main ideas, created a fluency which was easy to follow. The best responses demonstrated an impressive coherence using a range of skilful and accurate linking devices including the effective use of punctuation, adverbial connectives and original complex structures introduced by 'which' and 'who'. In order to achieve a high mark, repetitive use of 'and' or 'also' to link content is best avoided. It was common for some adverbial connectives such as 'nevertheless' or 'however' to be used incorrectly, and others such as 'in addition', 'moreover' and 'furthermore' to be placed at random at the beginning of a new sentence. 'On the other hand' and 'however' were regularly incorrectly used to move from the importance of rice from ancient times to the present day to reasons for its continuing popularity. The quality of coherence was also occasionally impacted by awkward attempts to link phrases such as 'pursuing this further', 'on the flip side of the coin' or 'adding on'. It is important for candidates to ensure that the continuation from the opening ten words is grammatically accurate, thus aiding fluency and coherence. Some candidates made no attempt to link the content and the result was a succession of simple or compound sentences which read rather like a list.

Question 2

In **Question 2**, candidates were to select and write down three of the writer's opinions, one from Paragraph 1 and two from Paragraph 4. The key to answering this question is to identify words or phrases which are subjective rather than objective.

The opinion found in Paragraph 1 and correctly identified by some candidates was that 'It is astonishing that there is archaeological evidence of rice cultivation'. An alternative to 'archaeological' was '8000 years ago'. The key word here is the subjective 'astonishing' since not everyone might consider this to be astonishing or amazing. Many candidates incorrectly gave 'rice was so widespread' or that 'settlements in rice-growing areas became sophisticated cultures', but these are proven facts and could not be credited as opinions.

There was more success with the first opinion in Paragraph 4: 'It is impossible to become bored with eating rice' with the subjectivity located in the words 'it is impossible to become bored' since this is clearly not the view of everyone.

Candidates found the second opinion in Paragraph 4 difficult to identify since it required separation of what is an opinion: that rice pudding is 'delicious', the subjectivity located in the word 'delicious', from a fact: 'short grains are used to make rice pudding'. The factual statements that 'rice is a healthy option' or 'it comes in a choice of flavours' were often given but could not be credited because both are proven facts.

There was a small number of candidates who offered their own opinions rather than the writer's opinion, as required by the rubric, or provided a summary of the content of each paragraph such as 'In Paragraph 4, the writer tells us about the different ways we can cook rice.' Own word alternatives are best avoided because they rarely provided appropriate alternatives for all the details. Some candidates' responses were incomplete and only identified the subjective phrase such as 'is delicious' or 'It is astonishing'. Alternatively, others neglected to include the subjective phrase and only wrote 'there is archaeological evidence of rice cultivation'.

Section 2

While several candidates found the narrative text to be accessible and responses demonstrated good engagement, this was not the case for all candidates; others struggled with understanding the context and this impacted on the quality of their responses.

Each question directed them to the paragraph or area of the text where they would find the relevant material on which to base their answer.

Question 3

Question 3(a) was a literal comprehension question which asked how Pedro emphasised in his note that he could do 'all jobs'. There were several ways in which a candidate could answer this correctly, but what was crucial was that they identified that 'he offered a range of tasks', 'he was skilled in many areas' or, more simply, 'he could do everything'. Referring to 'the list' of jobs would also capture this idea. The answer could also be given by lifting from lines 2 to 3: 'He was offering his services for tree-cutting, housework, gardening, painting, decorating, rewiring and car maintenance, among other things.' Although it was not necessary to include all the jobs offered, what was essential was the inclusion of 'among other things' to sum up how much of a multi-tasker he is. Responses which relied on 'all jobs' from the question could not be credited unless there was some recasting such as 'he offered all kinds of jobs'. Similarly, 'There was a telephone number at the bottom of his list of accomplishments' was not creditworthy since the focus is on the telephone number rather than the many jobs. Reference to his 'spidery handwriting' was a common incorrect response.

Another literal comprehension question was **Question 3(b)** requiring candidates to locate in the final sentence of the paragraph the reason why the husband was 'impressed' by Pedro's note. There was a choice of two reasons here although many candidates gave both: his admiration for people who went out to find work and for people who showed ambition. Some candidates chose to answer in their own words: 'he liked ambitious people' or 'he approved of people who were motivated to look for employment'. Other candidates answered more inferentially, stating that 'he admired Pedro's ambition and efforts to get work' which was also creditworthy. It was, however, incorrect to say that he was 'impressed' by Pedro's note or his accomplishments.

Question 4

Question 4(a) referred candidates to the second paragraph and asked why the writer did not want to employ Pedro. Some candidates misread the question as 'how do we know the writer did not want to employ Pedro?' and wrote that '[she] voiced [her] reluctance to employ Pedro'. The more discerning responses identified her suspicion of 'those who claim the ability to turn their hand to everything.' 'Many things' or 'lots of jobs' were not acceptable alternatives for 'everything' or 'all jobs'. Similarly, 'she did not like' failed to capture the idea of suspicion and distrust. Occasionally, omission of key words from the acceptable lift distorted the answer so 'she was suspicious of those with the ability to turn their hand to everything' was incorrect. Explicit reference to Pedro could be credited such as 'she was suspicious of Pedro when he said he could do everything'. A few candidates wrote 'she was suspicious of Pedro' without providing a reason. The second reason why the writer did not want to employ Pedro was quite successful and the mark could be gained by lifting from the text at line 10: 'there was really little that needed to be done in the garden'.

Question 4(b) was a relatively straightforward literal comprehension question which most candidates answered successfully. The question asked what the husband wanted Pedro to do in the garden and the majority of candidates recognised that the task was 'to cut back trees'. The verbs 'cut', 'prune' and 'trim' were also acceptable but 'cut down' was clearly incorrect.

Question 5

Although not explicitly an own word question, **Question 5(a)** required some recasting of the words 'useless' or 'ageing' to demonstrate understanding of why the writer thought the men would not do the job efficiently, and it was not enough to copy these words from the quotation. Most candidates recognised that one reason was the nature of their tools. There were several adjectives that candidates could choose: 'old', 'ancient' or 'worn out' for 'ageing'; 'hopeless', 'ineffective' or 'inappropriate' for 'useless'. The second reason required inference about their 'ominously heavy lunch boxes' which suggested that they were more interested in their food and lunch than work. The significance of the adverb 'ominously' had to be appreciated for a clear understanding of the writer's opinions about the men. The impact on their work needed to be identified either implicitly: 'they would take a long lunch break', or explicitly: 'they would spend more time eating than working'. Consequently, responses which stated that 'they looked as if they had come for a picnic' or 'they had brought a lot of food' could not be credited. Instead of referring to the quotation in the question, some candidates incorrectly looked elsewhere in the paragraph, notably at the description of the 'ramshackle car' or Pedro's late arrival.

Question 5(b) was an inferential question asking why the writer was thankful she had not asked Pedro to do car maintenance. The mark was scored by identifying the 'ramshackle' or dilapidated appearance of Pedro's men's car or the fact that it is in 'poor condition' and they clearly 'cannot maintain it'. While some candidates recognised that their car was the reason, 'old', 'broken' and 'rusty' were not appropriate adjectives. Answers were only creditworthy if it was clear that the car belonged to the men and not Pedro who had, in fact, not yet arrived. The rubric advises candidates to focus on the third paragraph so any reference to Pedro's car was incorrect. Candidates found this question rather challenging and often focused not only on Pedro's car but also on the men's 'useless' tools or the fact that 'Pedro always arrives last'.

Question 6

Question 6(a) was a literal comprehension question which asked how the men showed their anger. Candidates could either focus on the men 'waving their tools like swords' or weapons, or that 'they attacked Pedro'. 'Waving their tools' without any reference to weapons or swords did not score because it lacked any sense of threat. Answers which simply stated that 'they attacked him' without reference to Pedro, failed to score since it was unclear who was the object of their anger. Several candidates provided a correct answer though equal numbers incorrectly focused on the men's 'mystified expressions', neglecting the fact that these 'expressions' preceded the anger, evident in the phrase 'which turned to anger'.

Question 6(b) required candidates to answer in their own words, as specified in the question, and the key words to be substituted were 'yelled' and 'in shame' for two marks. The strongest responses avoided repetition of these words and instead featured well-chosen alternatives such as 'shouted', 'scolded' and 'criticised loudly' for 'yelled', and 'embarrassed', 'regretful' and 'guilty' for 'in shame'. Successful candidates recognised that an own word question requires an explanation of the given quote rather than an explanation of the events causing Pedro to yell at his men, namely that they had attacked him. It was also incorrect to describe the relationship between Pedro and his men and the authority that he imposes on them.

In **Question 6(c)**, candidates were asked to identify one word in the fourth paragraph which conveyed the same idea as 'puzzled', the answer being 'mystified'. The paragraph was quite short, and the majority of candidates gave the correct answer, either as a single word or in a phrase with the answer highlighted by underlining or inverted commas. Some candidates incorrectly gave their own alternative word such as 'confused' or 'surprised' which are not in the passage.

Question 7

Question 7(a), a straightforward literal comprehension question asking what the writer had been expecting to hear, was answered correctly by most candidates who offered 'the whirr of the chainsaw', though 'chainsaw' alone was sufficient. The 'men at work' was also acceptable, but 'loud noise' or 'machines' lacked precision so were not creditworthy. It was also incorrect to identify what she had not heard: 'she had not heard the whirr of a chainsaw', or that 'she expected the men to be working' since this latter response distorted the question and lost the focus on sound.

Question 7(b) was a more difficult inferential question which required candidates to explain why the writer's question, 'Is everything alright?', was 'needless' and there were several ways candidates could answer – these all shared the common idea that things were not alright. The men were fighting one another could be captured by lifting from lines 30-33 as long as the lift included that they were 'pushing and punching one another'. It was incorrect to simply write 'without so much as a single branch trimmed' or that 'the men were arguing' or 'not working'. A second way of answering was to state that 'it was obvious that the men were not working' or that 'things were clearly not alright'. This idea could also be captured by explicitly considering the writer's perceptions: 'she could see that the men were fighting', or more succinctly: 'she knew the answer'. Several incorrect responses focused on the reason she went into the garden – to check on the men or to see what work had been done. It was also incorrect to suggest that it was 'needless' because the men were 'smiling, as though at a picnic' or because everything was alright.

Question 8

Question 8 was the second question which required candidates to answer in their own words. The meaning of the key words 'pittance' and 'hazardous' had to be captured, and, as with **Question 6(b)**, this had to be done within a sensible context. There was much more success with understanding the context in this question compared to **Question 6(b)**. However, the alternative words offered were not always close enough to the original words. The meaning of 'pittance' could be successfully captured in 'a little', 'mean' or 'meagre' amount of money. Their pay was 'low', 'not much' or 'not enough' could also be credited. Less successful attempts included 'they wanted more money' or 'they were not well-paid' since these answers did not capture the small amount suggested by 'pittance'. Candidates often recognised the challenging nature of their work in 'hazardous', but 'tiring', 'hard' or 'difficult' did not capture its 'risky' or 'dangerous' element. Other acceptable alternatives for 'hazardous' included 'unsafe', 'perilous' or that they 'could be injured'. Occasionally candidates ignored that this was an own word question and incorrectly shifted the focus to the argument about 'who should be the one to shimmy up the trunks'.

Question 9

Question 9 tested the deduction of meaning of words as used in the passage. The multiple-choice format allowed for candidates to take each of the four possible alternatives for the given word back to the passage and decide which was the most appropriate synonym for the original. Few candidates scored all five marks; many scored two or three marks.

The most successful attempt was with **Question 9(e)** where 'fallen' was correctly selected as a synonym for 'plummeted' by most candidates. There was also reasonable success with 'excuse' being correctly chosen for **Question 9(c)** 'pretext', and 'subject' correctly identified for **Question 9(d)** 'gist'. Very few candidates selected 'thin' which was the correct answer to **Question 9(b)** 'gaunt'. Instead, many were distracted by the description of Pedro's 'lined face' and chose 'old'. **Question 9(a)** was the most challenging question in which candidates had to select the most appropriate synonym for 'accomplishments'. Successful candidates recognised that Pedro was advertising not just the 'jobs' he could do, but, as 'the list' demonstrated, he was promoting his range of 'skills'.

Question 10

Question 10 was the section dedicated to the appreciation of the writer's craft and although many candidates tackled this more challenging question, several candidates provided no response to both parts. In both **Question 10(a)** and **Question 10(b)**, candidates were asked to give, first, the meaning of a phrase as

used in the passage, and then to give the effect of that phrase. As mentioned before in 'Key Messages', it is important that candidates distinguish between the two parts of the question. Too often candidates offered an effect as a meaning and vice-versa. No credit is given to candidates who simply identify a literary device, in this case the use of personification.

Question 10(a) directed the candidates to line 12: 'stealing sunlight'. There were two ways candidates could provide a meaning: the focus could be on the sun or sunlight, or it could refer to shade or darkness. It was not necessary to include specific reference to trees given the brevity of the quotation. Many candidates scored a mark by writing that the trees were 'blocking' or 'preventing' sunlight from passing through, 'the trees were getting all of the sun' or that 'sunlight was hidden' or 'taken away'. A small number made reference to the shade created by the larger trees and this was also correct, but it was not enough to state that the trees were covering the olive trees with no reference to light or shade.

Candidates found the effect of the figurative language very difficult to both recognise and explain. Instead, many candidates provided an alternative meaning or explained the consequences of the lack of sunlight: the olive trees would die. Other candidates justified the husband's decision to have the tall trees cut back which also could not be credited. However, a very small number of candidates were able to see beyond the literal, recognising that 'the tall trees were superior and dominant' while 'the olive trees were defenceless and vulnerable'. Very occasionally some candidates provided an effect which demonstrated thoughtful consideration of the 'stealing' image by suggesting that sunlight was 'precious' and the trees were like 'cunning' or 'crafty robbers', but answers like these were rare.

Question 10(b) directed candidates to line 45: 'Ripped from the main trunk' and many candidates provided a correct meaning by offering alternative verbs for 'ripped'. 'Separated from', 'torn off' and 'cut from' were all creditworthy as long as reference was made to either a branch or limb, or the trunk or tree. This meant that 'torn from the tree' scored a mark but 'torn from' failed to score. It was incorrect to state that Pedro and his men tore the branch from the tree and also to simply conclude that the tree was damaged.

As with **Question 10(a)**, candidates found the effect hard to identify, but there was a little more success here. Answers could focus on the incompetence of Pedro and his men or the suggestion of the branch being broken 'violently', 'forcefully' or 'brutally'; however, it was incorrect to suggest that the workers were brutal and violent and it was not enough to simply state that the tree was destroyed. A few correct responses also considered how 'shocking', 'dreadful' and 'ugly' the sight was, as suggested by the word 'ripped'. It was evident that some candidates looked for the answer by reading the rest of the details in the sentence, but comments about 'the limbs hanging in the evening light' and the damage to the tree's beauty were too unrelated to the original extract to be creditworthy.