ENGLISH LANGUAGE

> **Paper 1120/01**
> **Reading**

Key messages

Candidates did well when they:

- Read both texts closely.
- Followed task instructions carefully.
- Demonstrated the different skills required by each question, recognising that **Question 1** is assessing reading comprehension and **Question 2** is assessing understanding of the effect of the writer's language.
- Avoided unselective copying from the texts.
- Paid attention to the marks and answer spaces available for each question; these indicate the level of detail needed in the answer.
- Made valid inferences about a character's feelings based on textual details for **Question 1(h).**
- Copied out a precise quotation from the text for **Question 1(h)** as a text detail rather than providing a paraphrase.
- Organised their answers in the designated answer spaces for **Question 1(b)** and **Question 2(e).**
- Used their own words when instructed.
- Kept to a recommended word limit.
- Checked their responses.

General comments

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was no significant evidence that candidates ran out of time and were unable to complete the paper. Responses, for the most part, were clearly written although occasionally illegibility hampered reading. If a candidate wishes to change a response, a line should be drawn across it and the final version written below. Writing over an answer which has been erased results in illegibility. Candidates should try to confine their answers to the designated answer space and they are advised not to write more than is required by the task. If a candidate does need to extend a response beyond the designated space, they should do so using an additional page.

Candidates were asked to answer questions on two texts. The first text, **Text A**, a narrative text called *The elephant and the boy*, tested candidates' comprehension skills in **Question 1** and 16 marks were allocated to this question. **Question 2** tested understanding of the writer's use of language and its effect and nine marks were allocated to this question. Questions were in the form of short response sub-questions, the number of marks indicating the number of points or ideas required for each. The text proved accessible to candidates overall with some vocabulary and expressions stretching those who performed most strongly.

Several candidates performed very well on **Question 1**, particularly for their understanding of explicit ideas. Unless own words is specified, text vocabulary is generally recommended in **Question 1** responses, such as **Question 1(e)** when 'fresh water' was the correct answer. Attempts at alternatives, such as 'clean water', moved too far from the original meaning (since 'seawater' might also be clean) and was not creditworthy. In **Question 1**, some candidates copied out lengthy sections of the text with limited modification resulting in a response which did not directly answer the question.

While candidates were successful in identifying explicit details in the text, making inferences often proved more challenging. This was particularly evident in **Question 1(c)** where candidates did not always use the information in the text to make creditworthy inferences.

Not all **Question 2** responses were entirely confident. Sometimes **Question 2** sub-questions were answered as comprehension questions rather than being considered for the effect of the language used. Candidates

should ensure that for this question they go beyond the narrative and literal details and consider the suggestions and connotations of words and images. **Question 2** asked for an *effect* (in **Question 2(c)**), an *impression* (in **Questions 2(d)** and **2(e)**) and what is being *suggested* (in **Question 2(a)**). No credit is given to identifying language terminology such as metaphor or personification. The real skill lies in explaining *how* these features are effective.

Writing is not assessed in **Question 1** and **Question 2**, but answers do need to be sufficiently precise to communicate details and ideas from the text clearly and without ambiguity.

Question 3 was based on the shorter second text, **Text B**, *Local residents against plans for city zoo*. **Question 3(a)** asked candidates to write a summary in continuous writing of no more than 150 words in their own words. The task required candidates to gather only those key ideas relevant to the question, and do so efficiently, avoiding excess and indiscriminate content. Paper 1 is primarily assessed for Reading though 10 marks are available for both Reading and Writing in **Question 3(a)** making a total of 20 marks for this question. Stretches of copied text cannot be credited in the Writing assessment; therefore, to be successful candidates must rephrase the key ideas clearly, concisely and in their *own words*. In terms of candidates' performance on Reading, some candidates found it difficult to separate irrelevant content from relevant content.

The second task in **Question 3**, **Question 3(b)**, is a short opinion-based five-mark task in response to **Text B**. Candidates had to write from the perspective of an individual identified in the question with reference to the relevant details in the text. Careful reading of both the text and the question would have made the correct perspective evident. To achieve a high mark, relevant ideas from the text have to be inferred and developed. With seven lines available, it is important that the response is focused.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 Comprehension

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on **Text A**, a narrative text. These are short answers worth a total of 16 marks which test understanding of explicit and implicit meanings.

(a)   Successful responses selected the detail in the final sentence: Jahan's hair. An answer which also included Jahan was twelve, skinny, sunburned, restless or short was not creditworthy as this did not evidence careful selection; the question asked for the *'first* physical feature'.

(b)   The first part of the question for one mark was to infer how Jahan *felt* when he first saw Istanbul. A range of responses were acceptable provided they captured a sense of Jahan feeling *fascinated, intrigued* or *uncertain.* This meant that answers such as 'captivated', 'curious' and 'confused' could score. The feeling must be precisely identified and written in the designated space. A lift, rather than an inference, such as 'had a strange effect on his imagination' could not be credited.

The second part for two marks was to provide two supporting *details* from the text. Most candidates selected at least one correct text detail. Careful selection is necessary: 'he walked across the deck to the front of the ship' does not support any feeling; however, 'he peered' and 'a hazy strip of grey' do support Jahan feeling curious and uncertain. Supporting details should be provided as quotations from the text.

(c)   An answer to this inferential question lay in the detail that the elephant was clearly unwell: 'downcast and listless'. Candidates had to *explain why* Jahan hurried below deck so to simply repeat the text information, 'Chota was downcast and listless', or that he wanted to see the elephant, was an insufficient *explanation*. Candidates had to demonstrate an ability to infer that Jahan was worried about the elephant or he wanted to check up on Chota. An answer which read 'his job was to look after the elephant' provided a summary of the story and was not creditworthy.

An alternative answer could be inferred from Jahan informing the elephant that 'You've made it' and 'We're here', meaning that the following explanations could score: 'to tell the elephant they had arrived' or 'to inform Chota that they had made it to Istanbul'. Answers had to convey the sense of reaching a destination; so 'to tell the elephant they they're here' lacked clarity.

(d) Close reading of paragraph 5 enabled candidates to identify two out of the four possible details in this paragraph. Many candidates scored two marks. Some candidates incorrectly provided details from paragraph 4. Candidates must take care when copying text vocabulary. Occasionally, misspelling resulted in a response where the meaning was unclear or distorted, such as 'ragged beating' or 'swollen tank'; such a response could not score.

(e) Many responses to this literal comprehension question correctly identified the availability of 'fresh water' as a reason for a better life at the palace. The second reason was that they would 'adore' him or be 'kind' to him. Two reasons had to be selected from paragraph 5; information provided later on in the text was sometimes incorrectly offered, notably that someone in the palace would heal him or that he would be given lots of food. General comments that the palace had better facilities or that he would be treated better did not evidence close reading and could not be credited.

(f)(i) Many candidates correctly selected a straightforward lift from the text to answer the question: 'Chota refused to move'. A creditworthy answer had to capture the idea of the elephant being unwilling to move so 'Chota was not moving' or 'the elephant would not be moved' were also acceptable. However, 'the sailors could not move the elephant' was incomplete because we are not given the reason – the elephant's refusal.

(ii) Another lift from the text – they decided 'to winch the crate up' – provided a correct answer. Own word alternatives could also score as long as they conveyed the idea of the crate rising, so they 'lifted', 'hoisted' or 'pulled up' the crate were also creditworthy. Less successful responses omitted this idea of *raising* the crate and therefore did not fully identify how 'this problem' was solved.

(g) In **Question 1(g)**, the rubric made it clear that use of *own words* was necessary to evidence understanding of both 'ultimately' and 'managing' in the context of the text. Successful answers offered creditworthy meanings for both words, such as 'finally', 'at last' or 'after many tries' for 'ultimately', and 'able', 'succeeded', or 'accomplished' for 'managing'. Where answers failed to score both marks, it was usually the result of having explained just one part of the phrase or repeating the words quoted in their answer. Candidates also need to provide synonyms appropriate to the context.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(a)-(g):

- Read each question carefully; underline or highlight any key words.
- Check how many marks are allocated to each question.
- Read all the paragraph or lines identified in the question before deciding on an answer.
- If there is a section of text that is difficult, read around it to get an idea of what is going on.
- Avoid lengthy copying from the text.
- Carefully select detail from the text and only include what is relevant to answer the question.

(h) **Question 1(h)** is a three-mark question which focused on Jahan's feelings about the elephant. The first task was to explain in own words Jahan's different feelings about Chota. Candidates need to have read the whole text to be able to select those sections which are relevant to the question ('feelings about the elephant'): paragraphs 1-3 could be ignored from this question.

Responses could cover a range of relevant feelings, such as affection, concern, sympathy, guilt and relief. The question asks for *different* feelings so 'concern', 'worry' and 'fear' could only be credited once since these feelings are too similar.

The question then directed candidates to find three supporting text details (three quotations) to provide evidence for Jahan's different feelings. One text detail in the form of a quotation copied from the text is required for each feeling. Line and paragraph references are to be avoided and the supporting detail should be quoted in full. Some examples of correct responses to **Question 1(h)**:

- Jahan feels affection for Chota and calls him 'my friend'.
- Worried: 'feared the elephant's heart had stopped beating'.
- Taras 'glared at Jahan' making him feel guilty about Chota's condition.
- 'smiling as Chota popped the nuts into his mouth' – happy.

Some responses included an impressive range of vocabulary to describe Jahan's feelings, supporting each one with appropriate detail from the text. Candidates are advised to set out their responses clearly, with each feeling and corresponding supporting detail clearly identified.

Although a precise and accurate paraphrase is acceptable as a text detail, this approach is not advised as paraphrasing can all too easily result in generalisation or a lack of focus or detail. For example, 'Jahan was worried because *the elephant looked unwell'* is too vague to be credited as a paraphrase of 'downcast and listless'.

Weaker responses struggled to make inferences about feelings. These responses were characterised by lifting and narrative rather than explanations of Jahan's feelings. For example, a response which reads 'Jahan offered him handfuls of sweet almonds' is a text detail which narrates the events and makes no observation about Jahan's feelings. The addition of an appropriate identified feeling, for example, 'he feels affection', would have made this a successful response.

Advice to candidates on Question 1(h):

- Identify the sections of the text and the character relevant to the question.
- Consider the different feelings of the character in these sections.
- Use own words to describe the different feelings.
- Select evidence to support each feeling; this means a text detail in the form of a quotation.
- Make sure your supporting text detail is clear, relevant and not overlong.
- Present the answer clearly with each feeling supported by a relevant text detail.
- Prepare for this question by reading literary texts and try to describe the feelings of characters.
- Build up a vocabulary bank to describe a character's feelings.

Question 2

Candidates had to respond to a series of sub-questions based on Text A. These are short answers worth a total of nine marks relating to the author's use of language and the effect this has.

(a) Successful responses recognised the prediction that Jahan would become 'famous', 'popular' or 'well-known'. Common incorrect answers were 'successful' and 'important'; neither of which suggest that Jahan became a public figure.

(b) Many responses recognised the implication of 'mammoth' to suggest the door is very large, and that the word 'mammoth' emphasised the size of the door. The focus of the question was on size ('large') so responses which commented on age, strength or weight of the door were incorrect. Common incorrect answers stated that 'the door is being compared to a mammoth' or 'is as big as a mammoth' but these did not evidence understanding of the effect of the word.

(c) Candidates needed to provide two effects of the phrase 'airy home' for two marks. Success depended on considering the connotations of 'airy' and 'home' both individually and together. Many responses recognised that 'airy' suggests a spacious, open, ventilated or large area and any of these ideas scored a mark. The word 'home' suggests the barn was the place where Chota would live and it provided safety. The phrase also suggests that the barn is comfortable, pleasant and suitable for an elephant. A few responses noted the contrast between the 'airy' barn and the confined crate and ship, and this was also creditworthy. Less successful responses often repeated ideas such as 'it's large and spacious' but this could only score one mark. Often, incorrect responses relied on the text vocabulary, such as 'full of air', which did not evidence understanding of the effect of 'airy'.

(d) Two different ideas drawn from anywhere in the extract could score. Focusing on individual words is advised. For example, the extract tells us that Taras is 'sullen', and this conveys an impression of Taras as bad-tempered, unfriendly or glum. The verb 'glared' conveys the impression that he is angry or critical. Successful responses avoided repeating the words from the extract. This means that 'Taras thought Jahan was at fault' was creditworthy; however, 'Taras blamed Jahan' did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the effect of language.

(e) **Example**

The first task for one mark was to provide an example from the extract in the form of a quotation. Candidates are given a single line in the answer space to write their example and quotations should not exceed this line. Many examples were carefully selected, such as 'Taras had magical fingers' or 'piles of apples, cabbages and hay – a banquet', but too often the example selected was excessively long. An example must be carefully chosen since it needs to be rich enough in suggestion and connotation for two ideas to be confidently explained. For example, not much could be said about the quotations 'wrapping it with sacking' or 'apples, cabbages and hay' so these were unwise choices. Sometimes a single image, such as 'banquet', might work, but, generally, selecting a short sentence, part of a sentence or a phrase is advisable. Ellipses and line references are not acceptable substitutes for the words and are to be avoided. The example must be the words in the extract and not a paraphrase or a technical term such as metaphor.

Explanation

There were several impressive explanations demonstrating both careful and imaginative analysis of the selected example. An explanation had to be written in own words to demonstrate secure understanding for two marks. Successful explanations focused firmly on the connotations and associations of a word or image in the example chosen. For example, some candidates who selected 'Taras had magical fingers' explained that this suggested his ability and his wizard-like or supernatural power – thus concisely providing two ideas for two marks. Understanding the meaning of a key word is an effective starting point for understanding an effect of that word. Another well-chosen example which resulted in some very good explanations was 'deftly, gingerly he applied a foul-smelling lotion' with candidates commenting on Taras' expertise and gentleness in their explanation. These responses demonstrate the effective practice of candidates zooming in on individual words ('magical', 'deftly' and 'gingerly') and thinking about what each one suggests. It is this close analysis which is key to success.

Less successful explanations were characterised by repetition of the language in the extract. For example, the words 'magic' or 'magician' were often used to explain 'magical fingers'. A successful response would have focused on the effect of the central comparison, expressed in own words: 'Taras' skill is unreal' or 'his ability to heal Chota is miraculous'.

Explanations must only focus on the example selected. If a candidate selects 'applied a foul-smelling lotion', the explanation should focus on the unpleasant-smelling remedy, and not on Taras' skill or care in applying the lotion since there is nothing to suggest this in the selected example.

Advice to candidates on Question 2:

- Select the **Question 2(e)** example carefully, ensuring it is not overlong and quote it directly.
- Consider the meaning of a word before going on to consider what a word suggests and its effect.
- Zoom in on individual words within a quotation or extract rather than making general comments.
- Think of the associations, connotations, pictures and feelings created by individual words.
- Use your own words to explain effect.
- If a comparison is made, think about the similarities and about what connects the two things.
- Practise by looking at the effect of language in different texts such as advertisements and song lyrics.

Section B

Question 3

(a) In this selective summary task, 10 marks are available for Reading and 10 for Writing. For Reading, candidates are assessed on their understanding of explicit meanings and the selection and use of information for a specific purpose. For Writing, candidates are assessed on their ability to organise and structure ideas, and to use a range of vocabulary and sentence structures appropriate to context.

Reading

Key to success in the Reading assessment was careful focus on the task: the arguments against plans for the zoo. Successful responses focused on the task and selected a wide range of relevant points and used these points to answer the question. These responses navigated around redundant material and sensibly ignored details about 'Project Planet' which were irrelevant to the summary task.

Several relevant content points were easily identified by most candidates. The more straightforward content points included the zoo is historical, animals would be sold and there would be job losses. Some content points proved less accessible, requiring careful selection and attention to detail, for example, recognising that an argument against the plans for the zoo was not just the building of offices and apartments on the old zoo site, but the fact that these were unnecessary. Similarly, transporting animals alone is not a problem; it is the fact that the journeys are long or cause stress.

Weaker responses were characterised by irrelevance. Instead of selecting and presenting the key ideas economically and concisely, these less successful responses often relied too heavily on lifting sections of text, including dialogue, which does not demonstrate skilful or careful selection. Furthermore, some summaries considered both sides of the argument instead of focusing on the arguments *against* the plans.

Writing

Where summaries were most effective, candidates had made a consistent attempt to use their own words to convey relevant ideas efficiently and accurately to the reader. Candidates are not expected to change all key words or terms, particularly those words difficult to substitute economically, such as 'a tourist attraction', but they should not copy sentence structures or whole sentences. Most candidates worked hard at rephrasing the text, often providing clear and precise alternatives such as 'unemployment' for 'potential loss of jobs'. Successful summaries also wrote with a formality and clarity required for a concise summary style.

Less effective summaries included significant stretches of copied text, often spliced together, and occasionally there was not much which could be assessed as original writing or reworking which meant that these summaries could not achieve above Levels 1 or 2.

Writing in own words is only part of the requirement for a successful summary; writing concisely is essential too. This concision is achieved not only by vocabulary choices, but also by synthesis of ideas such as 'moving the historic and celebrated zoo far away…'. Avoiding a lengthy introduction and conclusion also helped achieve concision. Some responses were considerably longer than 150 words. Others adhered to the recommended length but took too long to explain a few ideas.

Successful Level 4 and Level 5 summaries were characterised by an impressive clarity and fluency, achieved by the use of varied original structures including relative pronouns, conjunctions and punctuation. These summaries were well-crafted and well-organised with appropriate linking devices such as 'moreover' and 'likewise' correctly used to guide the reader through the summary. Level 3 responses also demonstrated effective use of adverbial connectives such as 'furthermore' and 'in addition' to shape the content. When overused and placed mechanically at the beginning of sentences, however, these same connectives did not always aid organisation. Candidates should write formally in summary writing. This means avoiding phrases such as 'in the same vein', 'on the flip side' or 'on top of that'.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(a):

Reading

- First read **Text B** to gain an overview of the content.
- Read the question and make sure that you understand the task.
- Read the text again, underlining or highlighting the parts which are relevant to the task.
- Ignore any content not relevant, including lengthy explanations, examples and alternative viewpoints.
- Do not generalise an idea or miss out important detail.
- Do not expect every paragraph to have relevant content.
- Look out for repetition of the same idea written in different ways, or examples; these repeated ideas or examples could be covered as one point.
- Do not include content which is not in the text.

Writing

- Think of a sensible order for the points you have underlined or highlighted; this may be in a different order from the original text.
- If points contain similar ideas, try to link them or synthesise (combine) them for concision.
- Use your own words where possible with precise and appropriate vocabulary.
- Do not lift whole phrases or sentences.

- Write fluently and clearly with varied and accurate original sentence structures.
- Organise content so that ideas connect and flow from one point to the next.
- Use a formal writing style.
- Do not write more than 150 words.
- Do not spend too long on the first few points that you write about or include a lengthy introduction or conclusion which will use up your word allowance.

(b) In this short opinion-based task, candidates have to show understanding of implicit meanings and attitude in response to **Text B.** They have to demonstrate that they have understood a particular perspective, opinion or point of view. There are up to five marks available for this question.

The question makes it clear that the perspective candidates are to take is Lucy Graves who has 'worked closely with the zoo on 'Project Planet'' so it is logical that she would support this project. This question is testing reading skills. Successful responses returned to **Text B**, specifically the sections where Lucy Graves and 'Project Planet' are mentioned, and considered why she would support 'Project Planet'.

To reach Level 3, a response had to consistently demonstrate the correct perspective supported by *detail* from the *text*, such as 'I've created interactive displays', and *develop* this with sensible inference: 'young people will engage with computer technology'. A single idea or detail from the text could be developed at length; alternatively, two or three ideas could be referenced from the text and each one could have some inferential development.

Level 2 responses were characterised by some understanding of arguments supporting 'Project Planet'. Two or three marks could be scored with just details from the text: 'Visitors can take the free bus to see the older zoo residents in bigger enclosures'. Level 2 responses were not always fully secure in their understanding of the task or the text, often writing about both the advantages and disadvantages of the project. Thus, these responses, while being generally relevant, lacked the consistent viewpoint needed for Level 3.

Level 1 responses showed some awareness of the correct perspective: 'I think you should give 'Project Planet' a chance' but were then either very brief or failed to include relevant content.

Some responses demonstrated a misunderstanding of **Text B.** These responses confused 'Project Planet' with the old city zoo or demonstrated an incorrect perspective against 'Project Planet'. These responses gained no marks.

Advice to candidates on Question 3(b):

- Read the question carefully and identify whose perspective you are to identify with.
- Highlight or underline the relevant section(s) in the text where the person is mentioned.
- Decide the *likely* and *sensible* response of this person to the question. Think carefully before deciding if they agree or disagree with the statement.
- State an opinion and offer reasons or more detailed explanations for the opinion which are based on details in the text.
- Extend and develop the ideas with inference.
- Write in the first person.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

> **Paper 1120/02**
> **Writing**

Key messages

- Candidates should be reminded to maintain neat, legible handwriting with clear deletion and insertion practices.
- Allocating time for proofreading would help candidates to correct avoidable errors in spelling, punctuation, and grammar, especially in common words.
- In *Section A*, candidates should ensure they cover a wide range of ideas from both texts and rephrase these naturally in their own style.
- Adopting a logical structure and providing clear support for all ideas chosen from the stimulus texts by integrating development and evaluation with each idea rather than adding these separately would help many candidates to raise their mark for Reading.
- Practising evaluative language and sentence structures to make judgements explicit would be beneficial in helping candidates to prepare for the Reading element of the paper.
- In *Section A*, candidates should ensure they maintain a tone suitable to the required text type and audience throughout their response.
- In *Section B*, candidates should avoid producing over-long, formulaic narratives and should be encouraged to focus on originality and including features of narrative or descriptive writing for deliberate effect.
- Improving grammar control, particularly tense consistency, subject–verb agreement, articles, and verb forms, as well as addressing comma splicing and ensuring consistent sentence demarcation would help many candidates to improve the level of their response.
- Candidates should use vocabulary precisely, ensuring it fits the audience and context and should avoid forcing memorised vocabulary into unsuitable contexts.

General comments

The majority of candidates demonstrated sound understanding of the paper's structure and requirements. Most responses were of an appropriate length, enabling candidates to showcase their writing skills.

The majority of responses were neatly presented and easy to read, however a notable minority presented legibility challenges. Issues included extremely small handwriting, overly elaborate cursive styles, messy or cramped insertions, and excessive crossing out, which at times obscured meaning. In some instances, candidates attempted to insert additional material in margins or between lines, occasionally running text off the page and while some used brackets, arrows, or asterisks to indicate insertions, these were often unclear. Centres are advised to encourage candidates to use a single neat line for deletions and place additional material at the foot of the page, marked with a clear symbol for insertion.

Time management was generally good, with most candidates balancing their efforts across both sections. A small proportion spent too long on *Section A*, often by providing lengthy opening pleasantries or additional material which moved away from the ideas in the texts and, in these cases, this negatively affected performance on *Section B*. While planning is to be encouraged, a few candidates ran out of time due to writing full rough drafts; practice in how to plan effectively and how to edit could prevent this.

Candidates generally adhered to the Reading requirements of *Section A*, selecting ideas from both texts and integrating them into their responses. Most were able to adapt the material for the specified audience and purpose. However, a proportion of candidates did not include sufficient evaluation despite selecting a wide range of points. Successful responses were fuller and more developed, with more frequent attempts at evaluation, while weaker responses often included fewer ideas, and tended to include personal opinion in place of evaluation.

Narrative tasks were the most popular choice in *Section B*, particularly **Questions 4** and **5**, with **Question 5** being the clear favourite. **Question 5** allowed for a wide range of approaches, and many candidates produced engaging and coherent narratives, however some resorted to more formulaic pieces (such as last-minute sporting victories) that lacked depth of characterisation or descriptive build-up. **Question 4** also produced varied and generally coherent responses, though some were rendered less effective by their implausible scenarios. **Questions 2** and **3** were less frequently chosen; when attempted, some of these responses yielded creative and engaging work, though some drifted from descriptive into narrative.

Some candidates relied on memorised openings in *Section B*, which were sometimes only tenuously relevant to the main content. While such introductions were not irrelevant, they were occasionally stylistically mismatched to the remainder of the response.

A small number of responses in both sections were excessively long, leading to self-penalisation through loss of focus, loose structure, or rushed conclusions and candidates should be encouraged to adhere to the indicative word count in both sections. Conversely, there were few very short responses, and most candidates wrote enough to meet the demands of the questions.

Several recurring issues affected the clarity and overall effectiveness of responses. A frequent weakness was inconsistency of tense, with candidates at times shifting between past and present tense within the same sentence, leading to confusion for the reader. In some instances, candidates also moved between first- and third-person narration without a clear purpose. The other most notable weakness was in punctuation – particularly comma-splicing and the handling of dialogue.

Section A: Directed Writing

Question 1

General comments

Most candidates recognised that they were required to write an email and began and ended appropriately, usually opening with the given 'Dear Cousin' and closing in a warm, friendly tone. Many included a brief greeting or enquiry after the salutation, sometimes referencing the wellbeing of family members ('*I hope Auntie and Uncle are well*'), before moving to the main purpose of the email. Awareness of audience and purpose was generally secure, and tone was, for the most part, informal and conversational, as appropriate for writing to a family member. However, a small number of candidates adopted an inappropriately formal register more suited to a formal letter: '*I am writing to you to express…*' '*Yours sincerely…*'. Additionally, while tone was usually appropriate in the introduction and conclusion of responses, many candidates did not maintain this suitably in the body of their email; candidates are encouraged to be mindful of tone throughout the entirety of their response.

The majority of responses organised ideas sequentially, with points from Text A followed by points from Text B, followed by an opinion or conclusion at the end. Weaker responses adhered closely to this structure, often paraphrasing ideas without development or evaluation. Stronger responses were able to integrate ideas from both texts within the same paragraph, comparing or contrasting viewpoints e.g., cost vs experience or travelling before vs after university and embedding their evaluation throughout.

It was common to see rhetorical questions used to create an evaluative tone: '*Wouldn't it make better sense to travel while you are young enough to make memories with your friends?*' '*Once you start your career, will you have the time or energy to travel?*'. Both direct address and emotive appeals were also frequently seen: '*I've seen you with your head buried in books all year.*' '*You've been cooped up for so long – think about your mental health and wellbeing.*' Devices such as onomatopoeia, hyperbole, and emphatic language, e.g. '*It cannot be ignored*', '*You're only young once*', were effectively used to persuade in some responses.

Most candidates referred to both texts, though coverage was often more complete for Text A. Certain points from Text B – such as earning money, travelling when older, and making useful contacts – were omitted more frequently.

In more successful responses, ideas were rephrased in the candidate's own words and developed with personal or imagined examples while weaker responses relied more heavily on paraphrasing or lifting from the texts and missed opportunities for evaluation. Occasionally, candidates framed their ideas by referencing the texts explicitly, e.g. '*I read two blog posts…*' '*Pierre believes…*' '*Maryam says…*', and while this is a valid approach, it is one which requires some context to be provided within the response, and this was often missing.

Evaluation often appeared only in concluding paragraphs, frequently framed around time versus money (*'You can always earn money later, but you won't always have this much free time'*), while more developed responses incorporated evaluation throughout, weighing pros and cons as each idea was addressed (*'Some people think you should wait until you're older to travel, but by then you might have more responsibilities and less freedom.'*). Some responses concluded with a balanced 'split time' solution suggesting that the cousin *'work for part of the summer to gain skills and save money, then use the rest of the time to travel and make memories with friends'* which was rewardable as development rather than evaluation. The least successful conclusions simply restated points from the texts, e.g. *'I think you should travel because this will give you a lot of benefits.'* without further insight.

Most candidates used connectives and discourse markers, such as '*However'*, '*Moreover'*, '*On the other hand'*, accurately, though their overuse occasionally made the writing formulaic. More confident candidates varied their sentence openings and incorporated idiomatic expressions, humour, and personal anecdotes to create an appropriate conversational tone.

Overall, candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of purpose, audience, and format, with many producing coherent, persuasive, and appropriately toned emails. Stronger responses integrated ideas from both texts, used personal or imaginative development effectively, and sustained evaluation throughout. Weaker responses tended to follow the stimulus texts too closely, limiting development and evaluation, or adopted an inappropriately formal tone. Practise in integrating evaluation, balancing breadth of ideas with depth, and maintaining a consistent style appropriate to the audience would benefit candidates.

Reading

Candidates demonstrated sound understanding of the content and viewpoints presented in the stimulus texts. Almost all selected ideas from both texts, with only a very small minority relying on one text alone. Many candidates followed the order of ideas as they appeared in the texts.

Most candidates attempted to express ideas in their own words. Where this was done well, ideas were rephrased fluently and adapted to the task, while less successful attempts sometimes resulted in awkward or unclear phrasing. Whole-sentence lifting was rare, though shorter phrases were occasionally copied.

While the majority of responses included at least some development of their selected ideas, in weaker responses, development was limited to generalised statements: *'You can experience different cultures, traditions and languages.'* *'This will give you a chance to relax, refresh your mind and take it easy.'* However, some candidates developed ideas in a more thoughtful, thorough and personal manner: *'You can learn more about mountains and the different traditional festivals that take place around the world as I did when I visited the Kalash valley at the time of the Uchal festival.'* *'[The long summer break is] a time to relax. You can distance yourself from your busy life. Therefore by visiting places like mountains you can recharge your brain which allows you to be focused in university.'* Some responses developed ideas with the inclusion of an anecdote from the candidate's own travels: *'When I went abroad without my parents, it helped me to become mature and venture out of my comfort zone…. I became more independent and build my confidence.'* *'Whenever I recall my school life I only remember one thing – joyful memories with my mates. We travelled in the country visiting places we only learn about in geography lesson.'* Candidates also developed points creatively, such as linking travel to stress relief after years of study (*'It's not just a chance to relax but also refresh your mind and take a breather. I know how your brain is heavy with all the different studies you have been learning.'*), strengthening friendships before university, or experiencing diversity to prepare for meeting people from different cultural backgrounds. Linguistically, *'For instance'* and *'For example'* were often good signal phrases preceding development.

Many responses included at least some evaluation, often signalled by phrases such as *'In my opinion…'*, *'However…'*, *'You cannot ignore…'*, or rhetorical questions, e.g. *'Travel might be fun, but at what cost?'*. Stronger responses integrated evaluation throughout, weighing the merits of each argument rather than reserving judgement for a concluding paragraph: *'It is true that travel teaches life skills, but important skills can also be gained through work experience.'* *'Some people argue that travelling is expensive, but it is worth every penny if it gives you experiences you'll never forget.'* Other successful attempts at evaluation included weighing financial constraints, considering long-term benefits, challenging assumptions, e.g. *'Who in their right mind would want to work in their summer break*?' or providing evaluation in the form of prioritising a single idea already mentioned in support of the final judgement: *'Of all the benefits of travelling, the most important is definitely making memories with the friends that you won't see as often once you start university.'*

Some responses included development not attached to an idea from the texts which was then evaluated (*You should prepare for university in your break. You can get ready with reading books and going to the library as the work will be very hard and you might not be able to cope well if you haven't prepared. Surely you must see this the best decision for you.*) and candidates should be reminded that their development and evaluation needs to be rooted in ideas selected from the texts.

In some responses, development was of an evaluation of ideas, e.g. '*It will be far more beneficial if you grow up a little and then try this travel experience when you are mature. You will feel more confident because you have got the self-independence to go around safely without a single worry*', and valid examples in candidate responses were also seen of evaluation of the prevailing attitudes in the blogs with suggestions such as Pierre being well-travelled and able to appreciate travel while Marayam is more conventional in endorsing more traditional and cultural views on education and endeavour.

Common evaluation indicators included '*It is undoubtedly true that…*', '*without a doubt*', '*It is absolutely true that*', '*It surely teaches young people…*', '*I definitely agree that...*' and candidates would benefit from explicit practice of using these phrases in different contexts. Additionally, practice in the use of evaluative rhetorical questions, e.g. '*Wouldn't you rather…?*', '*Isn't it better to...than…?*', '*What would be the point of…?*' and in selecting key ideas from texts and exemplifying them would help many candidates to raise the level of their response.

Most responses were logically structured, though many treated the stimulus texts separately. Integrated 'for and against' approaches tended to produce more fluent and analytical writing but were notably less common. In addition, while some candidates offered extensive development and evaluation, insufficient coverage of the required range of ideas meant they could not achieve the highest Reading bands.

Overall, the topic proved engaging and accessible, and confident, audience-appropriate responses were frequent. Stronger performances were characterised by a wide range of well-developed ideas, integration of development and evaluation throughout the response, and consistent use of own words. Weaker performances displayed imbalance between the texts, minimal development, and evaluation either missing or confined to a brief concluding comment.

Writing

Many candidates adopted an appropriate tone for an informal email, generally maintaining a lively, supportive style suitable for the task. Openings and closings were usually included, although a suitable sign-off was sometimes omitted. Stronger responses engaged directly with the audience, using rhetorical devices, personal anecdotes, and appropriate informal language. A few, however, were overly formal due to attempts to incorporate sophisticated vocabulary.

Many candidates wrote in simple, clear sentences, often limiting one idea to each, which supported clarity. When attempting more complex structures, control was sometimes lost, producing jumbled or unclear constructions. Overuse of short sentences was also common. Recurring grammar issues included tense errors – especially confusion between past and conditional forms ('*will*' vs '*would*') and negative past tense forms ('*didn't believed*'); subject–verb agreement errors ('*there are many culture to explore*', '*one student claim*', '*proponents asserts*'); article omission or misuse ('*memories that will last [a] lifetime*'); incorrect verb endings ('*overcomed*', '*spended*'); and fragment sentences in which phrases or sub-clauses were punctuated as complete sentences. Control of basic punctuation was generally adequate. Frequent issues included comma splicing and lack of sentence demarcation; overuse or misuse of apostrophes (both in possession and contraction); double punctuation (e.g.,*?.*); inconsistent use of upper- and lower-case (e.g., *i* for *I*); and weaknesses with dialogue layout. In stronger responses, punctuation was secure and wide-ranging – including semi-colons, dashes, or brackets – accurately used.

While in many responses, spelling was generally secure, common errors occurred even with high-frequency words such as '*believe*', '*accommodation*', '*business*', '*opportunity*', '*definitely*', '*whether*', and '*different*'. Incorrect contractions such as '*did'nt*', '*your'e*', and '*are'nt*' appeared regularly and some candidates misspelled words printed in the question paper. Homophone confusion was also seen ('*their'/'there*', '*whether'/'weather*').

Many responses employed apt and sometimes vivid vocabulary such as '*mundane*', '*carefree*', '*far-fetched*', and '*plethora*', as well as idiomatic phrases including examples such as '*cooped up*', and '*massive dent in your wallet*'. Others attempted ambitious vocabulary that was ill-fitted to the context, reducing clarity. Some candidates overused idioms or clichés, e.g. '*every cloud has a silver lining*', '*it's not all rainbows and*

butterflies', without integrating them naturally. Reliance on stimulus text vocabulary was common in weaker responses, with some simply reordering words from the texts.

Many candidates produced coherent responses which adopted an appropriate tone. Stronger responses were marked by controlled sentence construction, accurate punctuation, well-chosen vocabulary, and engagement with the audience. Weaker responses typically displayed tense and agreement errors, punctuation weaknesses, over-reliance on the language of the texts, and contextually inappropriate lexical choices. Focus on grammar control, precision in expression, and proofreading, would help many candidates to raise the level of their writing.

Section B

Comments on specific questions

Question 2

Candidates who selected **Question 2** generally engaged well with the descriptive task, often producing vivid and detailed responses. The best responses maintained a strong descriptive focus, used a wide range of literary techniques, and demonstrated control of language throughout. This was the most popular of the descriptive options and it enabled candidates to describe a familiar or easily imagined setting.

Successful responses frequently maintained focus on a specific time of day, most often sunrise or sunset, sometimes using a circular structure to reflect the transition of light and atmosphere. They blended panoramic overviews with close-up details, creating shifts in mood such as moving from the lively noise of the day to the quiet stillness of evening. These candidates also employed multi-sensory imagery, incorporating sound, sight, touch, and smell to immerse the reader. Vocabulary choices were often sophisticated, with words such as '*azure'*, '*radiant'*, '*blissful'*, and '*glittering'* used effectively, alongside original figurative language and personification. The best descriptions also captured human activity with precision, for example, '*Children in neon swimsuits dash through the shallows while parents bicker over suncream.*'

Mid-range responses often displayed a clear structure, typically moving from a general view to specific details. Sensory detail was still a strength, especially in describing textures such as '*wet sand underfoot,*' temperatures like '*the cold water brushes against my warm leg,*' and sounds including '*the loud sea roaring like a lion.*' Some incorporated humour or playful observation, while others evoked the atmosphere of the beach through focused description.

There were, however, recurring weaknesses. A number of responses omitted the required focus on a specific time of day, or incorporated two different times, which diluted the sense of a unified setting. Some responses drifted into narrative recounts of trips to the beach, preparations for travel, or games played there, losing the sustained descriptive focus required. Others relied too heavily on pre-learned vocabulary and familiar images such as '*blazing sun,*' '*palette of lavender hues,*' and '*rhythmic waves'* without reworking them into fresh or personal expressions.

In some weaker responses, the writing became a list of descriptive features without a unifying perspective, leading to weaker structure and a loss of atmospheric control. There were also examples where dependent clauses or phrases were presented as standalone sentences, disrupting fluency. Weaker responses tended to be repetitive or overly generalised, as in '*We are on the beach. The sun is in front of us. The waves of water look beautiful.*' They often lacked variety in sentence structure, relied on learned words or clichés that were sometimes misused, and missed opportunities to explore senses beyond sight. In some cases, responses were discursive or narrative pieces about why they liked the beach or about fictional events.

Overall, **Question 2** produced some very engaging descriptive writing, with the strongest responses combining assured command of language with sensory richness and structural control. Candidates are encouraged to ensure they address the requirements of the question (in this case, the 'specific time of day'), avoiding narrative drift, and aim for originality over stock images.

Question 3

Question 3 was the least popular option in ***Section B***. Many candidates took a predictable approach, selecting two family members with opposite personalities and providing a simple contrast between them – often one quiet or reserved relative versus one loud or outgoing. While this approach gave the writing a clear structure, it frequently resulted in surface-level accounts rather than richly developed descriptive pieces.

Weaker responses tended to focus on basic physical description and simple personality traits, often presented in a list-like manner. For example, a candidate might note that one family member '*likes to study*' while the other '*thinks women should only do housework*' without further expansion or descriptive detail. In some cases, the writing was biographical or explanatory rather than descriptive, with responses presenting facts about relatives rather than evoking their presence through sensory detail or imagery. For example, one response stated: '*My mum cooks very delicious food which was sold to the customers and they like the food very much*' – a factual statement but lacking the descriptive colour required.

More successful responses moved beyond this surface contrast, creating rounded characters with a mix of strengths and weaknesses, and illustrating these qualities through anecdotes or actions. These candidates often integrated their descriptions, interweaving the portrayal of one family member with the other rather than presenting them in separate blocks. They made deliberate use of humour and personal insight, which added warmth and individuality to the piece. Examples included: '*My dad and his brother are like day and night. His brother was brought up in a rural area so his first love is farming… whereas the younger brother was brought up in the city so his hobby is partying!*' and '*My elder sister Sohana is as elegant as a divine angel sent upon us as a blessing.*' In these cases, contrasts in upbringing, lifestyle, or outlook were used to shape a vivid and engaging comparison.

Better responses also included emotional engagement, with many concluding that despite their differences, the two relatives remained important to the writer and shared mutual affection. This reflective element helped to give the pieces a more satisfying and cohesive ending.

Relatively few candidates exploited the opportunity provided by this question to create detailed, emotionally engaged portraits. Descriptive techniques such as metaphors and similes were rare, and most responses relied on straightforward adjectives. Nonetheless, when candidates approached this question with imagination and a genuine connection to their chosen subjects, the results were focused and engaging.

Question 4

Question 4 was one of the most popular questions in *Section B*. The most common scenarios involved bags being switched in airports, on trains, buses, or at school – often on the eve of an important event such as an exam or business presentation. Business-related plots frequently centred on missing laptops, while some stories introduced more dramatic elements such as criminal activity, smuggling, or even magical realism.

Better responses quickly established the central event, allowing space to develop the aftermath and resolution. These narratives often used *in medias res* openings, well-chosen direct speech, and controlled shifts in pace to create tension or humour. Titles such as *Security Misunderstanding* or *The Anonymous Writer* were used effectively to intrigue the reader. Stronger responses also developed characterisation alongside plot, showing relationships evolving between the bag owners or using the situation to reveal hidden aspects of their personalities. One example involved a girl whose friend deliberately took her bag containing a diary and then began secretly fulfilling the wishes written inside – a fresh twist that combined mystery with emotional depth. Another effective story used the premise of identical schoolbags, switched by two students with the same initials, to create conflict and subtle humour when one discovered the other had '*scrawls, drawings and love hearts*' instead of neatly organised revision notes.

Weaker responses often suffered from overlong preambles, such as lengthy accounts of a holiday journey before the bag incident occurred, leaving the main plot rushed. Others relied heavily on formulaic or melodramatic scenarios – bags containing weapons, drugs, or severed heads – which tended to sacrifice credibility for shock value. In some cases, excessive dialogue slowed the pace, especially when it did not advance the plot. Some candidates appeared to fit the wrong-bag element into an unrelated pre-learned story, resulting in a disjointed narrative. Common structural patterns were strictly chronological, though a few responses attempted time shifts with mixed success.

Endings frequently conveyed a lesson learned or a moral reflection, though these were sometimes overstated or tacked on without subtlety – for example: '*Never again judge a book by its cover*' or '*Life had given him a second chance.*' In contrast, more effective conclusions resolved the central tension naturally, whether through reconciliation, pride in having acted courageously, or the understated return of the bag.

The strongest responses to **Question 4** overall were distinguished by concise set-ups, convincing plot development, and purposeful use of language to create tension, humour, or poignancy. Less successful

responses were hindered by slow pacing, generic plotting, or an overemphasis on background detail at the expense of narrative drive.

Question 5

Question 5 was the most popular choice in **Section B**, producing a wide variety of responses. The given sentence was almost always included, often as the climax of the narrative and usually placed near the end, although some used it effectively at the start or wove it naturally into a moment of high tension. The most common scenarios involved overcoming fears connected to sporting events – particularly swimming competitions, football matches, and races – followed by stage performances, debating competitions, and public speaking events. A few responses ventured into more unusual territory, such as reality TV shows, fantasy quests, or mountain treks.

The strongest narratives gave equal weight to building the fear and showing the process of overcoming it, with vivid descriptions of setting, careful characterisation, and moments of heightened pace to convey drama. Some incorporated emotional depth and sensitive themes, such as overcoming social anxiety, dealing with bullying, or recovering from illness.

Many effective stories made good use of *in medias res* openings or flashbacks to structure the narrative, allowing the sentence to act as a turning point rather than an afterthought. These pieces often built atmosphere skilfully – *'Sunlight spilled across the field like melted gold, wrapping me in a radiant embrace'* – before increasing tension in the approach to the decisive moment. Dialogue was generally well integrated and helped develop character relationships or heighten suspense.

Some weaker responses typically dropped the given sentence into a pre-learned story without adjusting tone or plot, leading to awkward placement or tense mismatches. In other weaker responses, the 'fear' element was barely explored or mentioned only in passing before a victory scene. Flat or inconclusive endings – particularly those that relied on moralising lines such as *'Never give up on your dreams'* – were also common.

A minority of responses took a darker turn, incorporating macabre or violent elements that often felt disconnected from the theme of overcoming fear. These included graphic depictions of murder or abuse, which were less effective at sustaining coherence or emotional credibility, and it is emphasised that these are not suitable material choices for this exam.

Overall, in response to **Question 5**, the most successful responses combined a convincing and relatable fear with steady plot development, strong control of language, and a satisfying resolution, while less successful ones shoehorned the prompt into an unrelated storyline, undermining its impact.

Content and Structure

Most responses were clearly organised and paragraphed, with many candidates demonstrating an awareness of how to structure their writing for clarity and impact. Chronological sequencing remained the dominant approach, though some experimented with flashbacks, flashforwards, or starting in the present before returning to the past. While these non-linear structures occasionally added sophistication, they were not always executed effectively, particularly where tense control was weak. A small number of responses used frameworks like Freytag's pyramid, leading to well-paced climaxes and satisfying conclusions; encouraging candidates to make use of such frameworks would help many raise the level of their response. The majority of responses reached an appropriate ending, although abrupt conclusions – most notoriously *'And then I woke up'* – appeared relatively frequently.

In the descriptive tasks, structural success often came from variety: shifting the narrator's focus between sights, sounds, people, and animals, or contrasting characters' personalities in **Question 3**. Effective descriptive responses integrated sensory detail and figurative language, from auditory imagery to precise colour description, creating atmosphere and depth. Strong responses to **Question 3** contrasted aspects such as the '*soft, gentle voice of the sister'* with the *'loud bellowing roar of the uncle'*, embedding these traits in sensory imagery. Less effective responses listed descriptive words without context, weakening cohesion.

Narrative responses generally had clear paragraphing, but weaker pieces sometimes fell into short, underdeveloped sections or overused direct speech at the expense of plot progression. Common openings included setting descriptions – sunlight through curtains, dramatic weather, or the main character waking up – which were not always relevant to what followed. In stronger pieces, openings offered immediate characterisation through action or dialogue, sometimes using single-sentence paragraphs for impact. Many

candidates consciously crafted a lesson learned or twist ending, such as the protagonist losing the race instead of winning, which subverted expectations and was therefore effective.

There was widespread use of narrative devices – figurative language, direct speech, 'showing' rather than 'telling', and build-up of tension – and planning appeared to improve coherence in many responses, with notes indicating thoughtful consideration of pacing, tension, and structural features before writing.

Stronger responses employed direct speech to develop characterisation and atmosphere, often drawing on realistic moments from personal experience. They integrated setting, character, and plot into a unified whole, ensuring descriptive elements supported rather than slowed the narrative. Weaker responses, by contrast, tended to prioritise decorative description over narrative purpose, which sometimes led to unfocused or meandering structure.

Overall, while structure and paragraphing were generally sound, the most successful pieces combined thoughtful planning, varied structural techniques, and purposeful language use to create writing that was both coherent and engaging from start to finish.

Style and Accuracy

Overall, spelling was generally secure, with many candidates correctly spelling even complex words. However, in weaker responses, spelling deteriorated when candidates attempted unfamiliar or ambitious vocabulary, producing convoluted or unclear expressions. While some high-level lexical choices – such as '*ethereal*', '*windswept*', and '*loamy soil*' – were used with precision, others appeared rote-learned and ill-fitted to the context. Simplicity often provided greater clarity, and candidates who selected vocabulary naturally suited to the tone and task were the most successful.

Grammar was a more frequent source of error, particularly with tense consistency, verb endings, and subject–verb agreement. Some candidates shifted awkwardly between past and present tense, even within a single sentence, or changed from first to third person and back without clear intent e.g. '*As he turned to leave his phone buzzed. It was a message from the university I had dreamed of attending*'. Errors also occurred with modal verbs, singular–plural agreement, and possessive forms. These lapses often disrupted the flow of the writing and occasionally confused the reader.

Punctuation showed mixed control. Many candidates used full stops reliably, but comma usage was less secure, and a significant number of responses showed some evidence of comma splicing, misplaced capitalisation, and missing sentence separation. Weaker responses omitted or misused quotation marks and dialogue punctuation, particularly in longer exchanges. Semi-colons were often overused or applied inaccurately, sometimes littering a response unnecessarily when commas or dashes would have been more appropriate. There were also recurring issues with terminal punctuation in speech, double punctuation, e.g., a question mark followed by a full stop, and inconsistent paragraphing in some responses.

While many candidates demonstrated accurate spelling, basic punctuation, and coherent paragraphing, the most successful responses combined these technical skills with stylistic control. They selected vocabulary that enhanced rather than obscured meaning, maintained tense and perspective consistency, and used punctuation to shape rhythm and emphasis. Less successful responses often revealed a mismatch between learned language and genuine communicative intent, highlighting the need for candidates to focus on clarity, appropriateness, and sustained accuracy throughout their work.