

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/11
Paper 11

Key messages

- Play to your strengths – only respond to those questions that you have sufficient and genuine knowledge of.
- Consider the syllabus content – use your subject-based knowledge, as well as your own, to assist your selection of questions.
- Remember that anecdote can serve as an illustration but it is not a substitute for argument and debate.
- Avoid assertion – always provide evidence for what you think and evaluate that evidence.
- Essays are about the development of ideas, where any statement that is made is described, qualified, exemplified, and illustrated.
- The General Paper encompasses a wide range of topics, social, economic, scientific, geographical, cultural, to name but a few. Do your own research on topics that are of interest to you – use the media, books, libraries, and, of course the Internet, but not exclusively the latter.
- Students should aspire to be independent researchers while being mindful of the factual and the contextual.
- Finally have as many classroom or group debates as possible where students question others and themselves.

General comments

This examination's "Key Messages" were written in response to the very positive experience of assessing the candidates' performance. Centres are to be congratulated on fostering the spirit of inquiry that the General Paper is designed to award. What came across in the majority of the essays was an eager interest in the chosen topic and confidence in expressing ideas. Candidates opting for **Question 1** on religious education and **Question 10** on skyscrapers would obviously draw upon their personal, contemporary experience and could perform adequately if that was all they did. But that rarely happened. Instead they drew upon their historical and philosophical knowledge to add weight and context to their opinions. On **Question 1** many students discussed the danger of indoctrination and on **Question 10** one candidate referred to the Tower of Babel as an example of vainglory while, at the same time, acknowledging the iconic status of buildings such as The Empire State. Instances such as this were present in other question pairings where knowledge about the present day was complemented by knowledge of the past.

So long as candidates are prepared to question and challenge their own ideas it is likely that they will respond to topics in a thoughtful way. This examination covered topics such as war, the environment, the function of art, music, and writing in society. In only in one or two instances were there answers that could be described as one-sided or polemical.

If candidates have something worthwhile to say and if their train of thought can be followed without too much difficulty they can be confident of attaining a reasonable grade even if their use of English falls short of effective command. Previous reports can be consulted on the common errors of expression and while it is important to reduce these as far as possible, what is most important is a thoughtfully paragraphed response to the question. Meaningful introductions and conclusions certainly help but of paramount importance is the substance of the essay. While a functionally literate, but ill-informed response, may gain some recognition in terms of marks simply because the generic skills have been imbibed, it is the essay that engages with the question in an understandable way that really deserves credit. Those students that read widely and engage in class or group discussion will, in any event, be in the process of acquiring skills, which will result in error free expression. Incidentally it is not uncommon for a candidate to score highly on content, for example band 2, and not so well on use of English because of flawed expression, for example band 4. This might result in a mark of 23 for content but only 7 for English, giving a total of 30 for an essay, a quite satisfactory achievement.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was a popular question and was answered reasonably well by most candidates. There was, however, in some cases, confusion between religious belief and behaviour and the RE curriculum. There is overlap of course, but candidates need to focus on key words such as “curriculum”. Interesting answers discussed the constitutional propriety of religious education in state schools as opposed to faith schools and many argued for a multi-faith approach. Nearly every candidate argued that respect for religious beliefs had to be an integral part of any curriculum.

Question 2

Many attempted this question with some success. Candidates drew on their academic, local, and in some cases personal experience of war and conflict. These were very powerful responses which movingly illustrated the effect of war on young people and children. Examples were drawn from the First and Second World Wars and from wars of independence. A key word in this question was “justified” but it did not, in many cases, trigger the response expected; an exploration of the ‘just war’. The majority of essays, though thoughtful, were variations on the theme of the undesirability of war in the abstract. Once again the importance of spotting the key word or phrase in the question is underlined.

Question 3

As expected this proved to be a popular question in countries where access to a variety of these games is taken for granted. Few, if any, candidates succumbed to the temptation of producing a merely descriptive catalogue of games they were familiar with. Instead they took their cue from the lead statement and demonstrated that they were aware of the potential of games to widen vocabulary, introduce challenging ideas and concepts, and promote creative sharing with others. Many referred to games that enhance awareness of past events and others referred to those games that require calculation and deduction. It was noteworthy that candidates did not simply eulogise the world of gaming. Again taking their cue from the question’s phraseology they quite correctly and effectively challenged the notion that playing games online “may be beneficial”. These candidates, while acknowledging their utility, also drew the reader’s attention to the violence in many games and the effect of such violence upon the young.

Question 4

A few candidates found it difficult to focus on just one challenge, but most selected from a range including poverty, the environment, population and, most often, global warming. Some essays were too alarmist in tone, but others were more nuanced. What candidates did not tend to do, however, was to see the significance of the word 'more' in 'more seriously'. Where candidates failed to take account of the key word 'more' they left themselves without a comparative edge to their response. Consequently the usual suspects already mentioned, while relevant, featured in the majority of the essays. Candidates who suggested global challenges such as cyber-crime, hacking, various forms of discrimination and oppression, and even in one case globalisation itself, demonstrated their individuality and their ability to see the potential of the question posed.

Question 5

This question attracted the attention of a fair number of candidates, but a few of them did not really understand GM crops and focused mainly on farming. However, there were many good responses illustrating agricultural developments in different countries. The effect on the environment was considered an important factor.

Question 6

The stem sentence encouraged a few candidates to restrict themselves to medical matters. While competent essays were written in that context, better essays focused on the need to maintain the balance of nature. Those who ignored the second half of the question were missing out, however, on the actual scope of the question. In most cases knowledge about specific species' interrelationships was limited.

Question 7

This was the only question that had very few responses. However, credit was given to those candidates who adopted the legitimate approach of discussing, from any angle, the various 'alternatives to modern medicine'. Two candidates had fascinating knowledge of medicinal South American plants that have proven medicinal benefits. Others chose to write about the variety of alternative therapies available and that was more than acceptable.

Question 8

This proved to be a popular question that elicited a wide and interesting range of responses. Given the geographical reach of this examination many answers provided relevant local examples; the Everglades, Sea-world, Yellowstone, Mana Pools, the Serengeti and the Kruger National Park, to name but a few. The threat posed by poaching featured in several essays as did the allegedly cruel practice of keeping animals for popular entertainment. This is where evaluation stood out; many candidates argued for animal freedom but conceded that in today's circumstances zoos may offer the only chance for conservation and protection of certain species. Where wildlife tourism was understood, candidates were able to argue that the revenue earned could be used to sustain animal life in the wild. What was lacking, however, was sufficient attention to the key words 'How far?' Perfectly competent essays confined themselves to zoos and parks when they might easily have accessed content marks in the top two bands by exploring alternative methods of wildlife protection. Nevertheless without exception candidates demonstrated real concern for endangered animals.

Question 9

This proved to be a fairly popular question and candidates in all instances were able to describe the music scene in their respective countries in a lively and detailed way. Some found it harder to estimate their country's influence beyond its own borders but thoughtfully acknowledged that influence was limited for cultural reasons while citing examples where local musicians had in fact performed in other countries. Some wrote about the influence of particular genres, for example the Marimba, and a few candidates pointed out that the roots of the blues and jazz are in Africa.

Question 10

Obviously this question had a particular resonance in the USA. However, responses did come from other parts of the world where, among other things, they were deemed to be symbols of economic success. Apart from one gilded tower in NYC, several candidates referred to skylines in their own countries, for example in Dubai and Qatar. That the skyscraper might signify wealth and power was a common thread in all the essays but several candidates went beyond that and spoke of their aesthetic qualities, the dramatic settings of them, for example Manhattan, Chicago, and London. One essay made a powerful statement about the building of a memorial to commemorate 9/11 and the destruction of the “Twin Towers”. Several essays were evocative in their own right.

Question 11

This question proved quite popular and all the respondents were able to provide a range of examples and usually were able to define what they thought of as useful and beautiful art. A significant few saw that there can indeed be beauty in function; architecture, landscaped gardens, bridges, fashion, jewellery, all of these and more were mentioned. Several candidates while stressing the aesthetic and emotional pleasure to be derived from paintings, sculpture, and photography, also pointed out that utility lay in how renowned artefacts create revenue, employment, and status. One candidate offered Venice as an example of how beauty and utility go hand in hand. Another pointed out that sculpture in the Shona tradition has been exhibited and purchased not only in Africa but all around the world. Those who answered this question engaged with the apparent distinction between utility and beauty and drew upon both their local and international knowledge.

Question 12

This question was attempted by a significant number of candidates. Because the question clearly stated a “writer” not writers, candidates had to have specific rather than general knowledge. Only a few used more than one writer in their responses, and even then they clearly marked out one as embodying the people’s voice. Women writers, such as Maya Angelou and Toni Morrison, were frequently mentioned, demonstrating that they had great meaning in the lives of these students. Those who referred to Chinua Achebe and other perhaps not so widely known African writers wrote movingly about how such writers have given voice to the oppressed and colonised. South American candidates referred to the works of a variety of writers including Mario Vargas Llosa and Isabel Allende. Those who chose to discuss the importance of writers from their own region or culture were assured of a sympathetic reader response. Nevertheless the universal appeal of Shakespeare, Dickens, and perhaps more surprisingly Wilfred Owen, was argued for by a few who were successful in making a case for their proposition.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/12
Paper 12

Key Messages

Content

- Answer the **set** question and focus on the key words.
- Support your main points with appropriate examples.
- Keep anecdotal/personal evidence to a minimum.
- An introduction should immediately address the **key words** of the question and show understanding of it.
- A conclusion should be a reasoned assessment of the arguments made.
- Ensure that all aspects of the question are addressed.
- Re-visit the question after each paragraph.
- Use discourse markers (however, consequently, in addition) to link ideas and paragraphs to produce a clearly structured, cohesive argument.
- Solid details/examples avoid vagueness and show knowledge.

Use of English

- Leave time to check your English thoroughly to avoid basic errors.
- Concentrate on using appropriate vocabulary so expression is fluent and precise.
- Basic sentence structure/grammar needs to be accurate to ensure clear communication of content.

General comments

Generally, responses did address the question and were structured within a paragraph framework using an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

More successful responses answered the question as set, focused on the key words and included a variety of examples to illustrate the main points of the essay. Such points were sometimes developed to add depth, and make the argument more convincing and engaging thus avoiding vague generalisations. Limited anecdotal evidence is acceptable but should not dominate the whole essay and should be used in conjunction with other details.

When the set question demands it, candidates should focus on aspects of their own country; if this is not the prompt then a broader focus is required. Stronger responses demonstrated good topic knowledge and included local, regional and global examples to support points. Sometimes candidates chose questions where they were either insufficiently familiar with the topic or did not understand all aspects of the question. Candidates need to spend time studying the chosen question to make sure they understand what is being asked and then re-visit after every paragraph to check that key words are being addressed. This could add to their skills and develop confidence as they progress through the essay.

Most candidates used the time reasonably efficiently and were able to produce two clearly structured essays close to the recommended length. Introductions may have been long at times but a majority did attempt to address the question and this was reflected in the remaining response. Even though there is a time pressure here, candidates should attempt to produce a conclusion which arrives at a reasoned assessment of the main arguments rather than just summarising what has already been written.

Rubric infringements were rare and there were very few unfinished essays. The quality of the Use of English was variable and depended on whether grammatical errors disrupted the fluency or not. Consequently, some candidates need to work on forming secure, grammatically correct sentence structures and to leave time at the end to check for basic errors. A thorough and systematic checking could greatly improve the standard as well as clarify the content. Also, a substantial number of candidates have acquired a wide-ranging English vocabulary but need to improve putting these words in an appropriate context in order to create greater precision.

Use of English

Basic errors need to be checked and corrected in order to improve Use of English marks. Typical examples are listed below:

- subject/verb non-agreement
- incorrect use of prepositions
- frequent incorrect use of definite/indefinite article (the society)
- omission of apostrophes
- confusion between their/there, to/too, your/you're
- incorrect comparative forms
- missing endings on plurals
- incorrect use of vocabulary
- checking word order (syntax) to ensure clear meaning

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was the most popular question and the majority of answers were of a reasonable standard. Clearly, it was a question that a large number of candidates had the knowledge to answer and many offered a balanced view. There were considerations of economic and employment benefits of the tourist industry alongside issues such as pollution, land clearance and culture (as either an educational exchange of ideas or as exposure to corrupt influences). Some responses offered anecdotal accounts of exchanges with tourists and sometimes generalised about crime without connecting to the tourist industry. More successful responses went further and began to question certain ideas such as whether a certain amount of pollution was worth it, given the benefits, using appropriate examples as support. Sometimes there was a tendency to be too descriptive but a majority were able to integrate their own views and present valid arguments.

Question 2

This was not a very popular question. There tended to more of a focus on 'pessimism' where responses viewed the future of the world in purely negative terms resulting in many one-sided arguments. More successful responses were more balanced, with examples of why there was reason for optimism or pessimism. Arguments tended to develop through specific examples such as named wars, terrorism events, good/bad behaviour and technology. Here, candidates were able to deepen the discussion by connecting such examples to personality, attitudes, religion and upbringing and concluding that these were the main producers of pessimistic/optimistic outlooks on the world.

Question 3

This was not a very popular question. The quality of answers tended to depend on how well versed candidates were with the intricacies of governmental systems and democracy. Many responses gave generalised accounts of how politicians could not be trusted, without any real focus on the conduct of elections or unfairness. More successful responses drew on a range of examples from around the world, including the recent US presidential election and Russia, alongside knowledgeable accounts of elections in the candidate's own country.

Question 4

This was quite a popular question. Some responses were anecdotal with complaints about sources of noise in the local neighbourhood (from traffic, construction sites, over-population, machinery or other people's music) and references to headaches or being stressed. Others focused on quality of life with limited references to noise pollution so were not completely addressing the question. More successful responses explored what caused noise pollution and evaluated whether quality of life was threatened by this, with a consideration of the scale of the problem.

Question 5

This was a popular question. Some candidates simply detailed a range of initiatives without reference to the key word 'most' whereas a few only considered one so were unable to put the argument into a context of other initiatives with which to make a comparison. Candidates tended to describe their own lives in relation to such issues as littering, missing the opportunity to broaden the scope. The most successful responses were those which were able to explore several initiatives and then decide on the most effective one and evaluate why this was so. Initiatives included education, fines, and schemes for recycling, the Kyoto Agreement and other large scale environmental projects.

Question 6

This question was not very popular, but there were some good examples of the types of housing required in hot areas, cold places, areas of seasonal variations and those with excessive rain, snow and drought. Many listed these whereas others were descriptive and then said why it was effective. The most successful responses were able to look at the 'to what extent' part of the question and, as a result, evaluate.

Question 7

This was another popular question. Although most candidates were able to give good reasons for free medical care, the discussion of the drawbacks were generally less well developed. Many concentrated on anecdotal evidence of people who allegedly took free drugs and sold them on or made themselves as unhealthy as possible with the knowledge that free treatment was available. More successful responses looked at actual healthcare systems, both free and otherwise, and compared their effectiveness, focusing on costs to the government, tax issues, human rights, the value of means testing such things and issues of fairness, exemplifying specific hospitals, health care systems and specific countries.

Question 8

This question was not very popular. Most responses described the use of mathematics in technology but were also familiar with terminology such as 'binary', 'algorithms' and 'equations'. More successful responses suggested a more solid background in mathematics, producing knowledgeable arguments and drawing on a range of technologies that required mathematics in their development. More successful responses went beyond the descriptive and evaluated the question, suggesting that new materials and innovation were just as important as mathematics in technology.

Question 9

This was not a popular question. Many responses explained the prevalence of disturbing or shocking content in films or books but without exemplification although the terms 'provoking or disturbing' were not always well understood. Some responses compared books with films or discussed how films could produce copycat violence. More successful responses considered a variety of literary and visual texts and evaluated how 'provoke or disturb' could relate to themes intended to be controversial with the aim of stimulating thinking and feelings.

Question 10

This was not a popular question. Most responses described how personal photographs could mean one thing to one person and something quite different to another, with digital media able to edit in order to distort the truth, hence examples were anecdotal. More successful responses looked at the way the mass media could use such digital tools to present bias in photographs to affect truth/meaning although often without exemplification.

Question 11

There were very few responses to this question. Folk tales with a moral message were considered and whether or not these had any currency in the modern world. Often there were biblical references and responses tended to describe the narratives of specific stories. More successful responses did attempt to evaluate and suggest that the message/moral of most fables had a universal relevance but that the actual story was likely to be a product of its time.

Question 12

This was not a popular question but those who attempted it generally produced reasonable responses, showing knowledge of the role of dance in their cultures and traditions. More successful responses did question the relevance to modern culture and considered a more global perspective. There were suggestions that a country needed its traditional dance to maintain its identity, history and even tourism in an ever-changing world.

GENERAL PAPER

Paper 8004/13
Paper 13

Key Messages

Content

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- Re-visit the question after each paragraph.
- Use discourse markers (however, consequently, in addition) to link ideas and paragraphs to produce a clearly structured, cohesive argument.
- Solid details/examples avoid vagueness and show knowledge.

Use of English

- Leave time to check your English thoroughly to avoid basic errors.
- Concentrate on using appropriate vocabulary so expression is fluent and precise.
- Basic sentence structure/grammar needs to be accurate to ensure clear communication of content.
- Avoid using a casual/informal style.

General comments

Generally, responses did address the chosen questions and were structured within a paragraph framework using an appropriate introduction and conclusion.

More successful responses answered the question as set, focused on the key words and included a variety of examples to illustrate the main points of the essay. Such points were sometimes developed to add depth, and make the argument more convincing and engaging thus avoiding vague generalisations. Limited anecdotal evidence is acceptable but should not dominate the whole essay and should be used in conjunction with other details. Also, essays should be in a formal style appropriate to a structured discussion so an informal, 'chatty' style is inappropriate.

When the set question demands it, candidates should focus on aspects of their own country; if this is not the prompt then a broader focus is required. Stronger responses demonstrated good topic knowledge and included local, regional and global examples to support points. Sometimes candidates chose questions where they were either insufficiently familiar with the topic or did not understand all aspects of the question. Candidates need to spend time studying the chosen question to make sure they understand what is being asked and then re-visit after every paragraph to check that key words are being addressed. This could add to their skills and develop confidence as they progress through the essay.

Most candidates used the time reasonably efficiently and were able to produce two clearly structured essays of around the recommended length. Introductions may have been long at times but a majority did attempt to address the question and this was reflected in the remaining response. Even though there is a time pressure here, candidates should attempt to produce a conclusion which arrives at a reasoned assessment of the main arguments rather than just summarising what has already been written.

Rubric infringements were rare and there were very few unfinished essays. The quality of the Use of English was variable and depended on whether grammatical errors disrupted the fluency or not. Consequently, some candidates need to work on forming secure, grammatically correct sentence structures and to leave time at the end to check for basic errors. A thorough and systematic checking could greatly improve the standard as well as clarify the content. Also, a substantial number of candidates have acquired a wide-ranging English vocabulary but need to improve putting these words in an appropriate context in order to create greater precision.

Use of English

Basic errors need to be checked and corrected in order to improve English marks. Typical examples are listed below:

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- omission of apostrophes
- confusion between their/there, to/too, your/you're
- incorrect comparative forms
- missing endings on plurals
- incorrect use of vocabulary
- checking word order (syntax) to ensure clear meaning
- keep informality/colloquialism to a minimum

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This was the most popular question. Most responses suggested alternatives to the classroom (home tutoring, the internet, online courses, field trips, family, and peer groups) with some detailed descriptions. There was a tendency to list these and just be positive about the alternatives and negative about the classroom. More successful responses did discuss alternatives in the context of classroom provision, often concluding that the classroom was possibly the best place for subject learning and gaining qualifications but that it did not suit some individuals and that 'life education' could be found elsewhere. Also, the classroom was often viewed as a variety of places (laboratory, library, gym, playing field) and that visiting a museum was possibly more meaningful than classroom History. The most successful ones considered a balanced discussion with a range of examples and an evaluation of 'only'.

Question 2

There were no responses to this question.

Question 3

This question was not very popular, but there were some reasonable responses. Most tended to describe developing friendships and the community/social activities which came from this. Also there were references to forming specific identities and loyalties as well as encouraging confidence. More successful responses did consider 'to what extent', questioning whether the competitiveness of sport would more likely foster divisiveness and a sense of isolation beyond the event, especially if performance was poor. Balanced against this was the suggestion that the event itself created community via team spirit, fairness and dependence on others which could then be fostered elsewhere.

Question 4

There were a few responses to this question. Nearly all of the responses focused on the environment and background with descriptions of influences such as peer group pressure, poverty and educational opportunity as contributing factors to our well-being. More successful responses did consider genetics but only briefly in the context of disability or being 'born with a certain intelligence'. Often family background was judged to be the most important environmental factor with a suggestion that, although family health issues could be inherited, upbringing was more influential on well-being.

Question 5

This was a popular question. Most responses described the health implications of cigarettes, alcohol and food and showed knowledge of specific warnings. Usually there was a reference to 'effective' but this was often generalised to 'if you are an addict then you will ignore any warnings'. More successful responses provided a balanced discussion around the word 'effective' suggesting that 'health warnings' were often government initiatives designed to improve the health of a country. Whereas cigarette warnings used graphic language and visuals to emphasise the dangers, food warnings were often discrete, giving information of ingredients, sugar/fat content and potential hazards for those with allergies. Here, 'effective' was dependent on whether individuals needed to know this information. Some responses emphasised the need for cigarette warnings to be bold and sensational in order to get through to existing addicts so as to be more effective.

Question 6

There were a few responses to this question. Most responses were generalised descriptions of 'the wonders of nature' with little reference to science, suggesting that it is unnecessary to appreciate nature. More successful responses did give examples, suggesting that science adds to the wonder of nature otherwise it is only a superficial scenic beauty which is appreciated. Some responses referred to television documentaries which allowed an observation of Nature with science allowing it to be fully appreciated and understood.

Question 7

There were only one or two responses to this question. Many of the projects chosen were ambitious and were often described in detail but with little reference to 'how could you make it happen'. More successful responses considered environmental projects to reduce pollution with reference to needing finance, expertise and materials. Here there was a questioning as to whether there would be demand for such a project. In conclusion, it was suggested that unless there was government backing, any such project was doomed.

Question 8

There were no responses to this question.

Question 9

This was quite a popular question. Most responses ignored or wrote about all three art forms although with a very generalised anecdotal 'outlook on the world' (overcoming depression, in touch with emotions, relating situations to own life). More successful responses usually focused on music and quoted lyrics to explain 'outlook' although tended not to go beyond anecdote and description. Some responses did suggest that such art forms are escapist and for entertainment and have no influence on 'outlook'.

Question 10

There were only one or two responses to this question. Responses tended to describe decorations with references to untidiness, wealth, interest or fashion. More successful responses provided balance suggesting that the way we decorate our homes might indicate flamboyance but is more likely to be a fashion statement just to impress others. Others suggested that people are more complex than this or that the decoration could indicate the opposite of 'who we are' and be designed to deceive as much as anything else.

Question 11

There were only a few responses which described favourite musicians and why they were preferred. Only one response considered the second half of the question emphasising the atmosphere and connection of

live performance as well as the spontaneity and the thrill of being with a large group of fans. 'Appreciation of music' was considered in terms of whether the performance was as good live as on record.

Question 12

There were a few responses to this question. Most showed some knowledge of 'music education' with reference to tradition, learning to play a musical instrument and appreciating classical music. Often these were seen of value to those who were interested and wanted to be musicians themselves. More successful responses did consider 'assess', suggesting that a music education did broaden musical horizons and help discover musical talent. However, this was placed in the context of it being an elitist activity and that learning mathematics, English and science was of more value.