BURMESE

General comments

This was a strong group of candidates, and larger than last year's group. A number of candidates seemed to be native speakers of Burmese. Most were able to write maturely and coherently in formal Burmese. Candidates are strongly advised to read through their own work in the examination: this gives a chance to weed out spelling errors which can needlessly spoil good writing.

Reports for previous years have encouraged candidates to try to form an awareness of the difference between colloquial and literary writing styles in Burmese. Most candidates are aware of the difference, and choose to use formal literary Burmese except when reporting speech, when they write in the colloquial style. However, some candidates mix the two styles, which gives an impression of wanting to appear formal while actually producing mixed-register language. Candidates are advised to avoid writing in an over-complicated, over-formal style, since very often this can detract from the clarity of the writing. In fact, the colloquial style is acceptable throughout the paper.

This year a few candidates wrote in very poor handwriting. Candidates are reminded of the importance of writing legibly.

Comments on specific questions

Section A: Composition

Question 1

(a)   *Do you think the death penalty is ever justified?*

The candidates who chose this topic all scored highly. Candidates should be encouraged to tackle the more abstract composition titles: as long as they express clearly organised opinions, they should do well.

(b)   *Write a letter thanking someone for help they have given you.*

This topic was popular with the candidates and they produced some very interesting letters, ranging from heartfelt letters to benefactors to letters thanking friends for help with boyfriend or girlfriend problems. Most of the responses were very engaging and entertaining.

(c)   *What is your favourite song and why?*

High marks were scored by those who chose this option and explained why they considered a particular song to be their favourite.

(d)   *Describe how it feels to hold a small baby.*

This title drew from those candidates who chose it some delightful descriptions of first encounters with baby brothers, sisters or cousins, some of which were very touching – and some also very funny.

(e)   *Compose or report a conversation between two old neighbours talking about changes in their neighbourhood since they were young.*

The candidates who answered this question produced some conversations which were touchingly and observantly written.

Section B: Translation

Question 2 Translation into English

Most candidates coped extremely well with this passage, although there were a few minor points of grammar and spelling in English. Where candidates did lose marks, it was for summarising or paraphrasing the content of the passage. Candidates are reminded of the instructions for this question: "Aim to produce a translation in natural-sounding English which conveys the sense of every word in the original Burmese."

Question 3 Translation into Burmese

This translation was expertly tackled by the majority of candidates. Particularly impressive was the candidates' ability to render complex sentences into Burmese with great skill and accuracy. However, candidates should bear in mind that a translation must be exactly that, not a summary of the content of the original passage in the target language. Additionally, candidates will lose marks if they do not translate every sentence in the passage.

Section C: Comprehension

Questions 4 – 8

Full marks were awarded to candidates who answered the questions correctly and provided full evidence from the text to support or explain their answers. Candidates coped extremely well with this section, and this is evidence that the candidates were able to digest the passage and think their way into the situations it describes without difficulty. Candidates should remember to answer all points in the questions set *in their own words*, and not simply to copy out the relevant passage from the comprehension text.