

REPORT OF THE BOARD OF EXAMINERS ON THE EXAMINATIONS HELD IN

April 2002

Subject 201 — Communications

Introduction

The attached subject report has been written by the Principal Examiner with the aim of helping candidates. The questions and comments are based around Core Reading as the interpretation of the syllabus to which the examiners are working. They have however given credit for any alternative approach or interpretation which they consider to be reasonable.

K Forman
Chairman of the Board of Examiners

11 June 2002

Candidates were asked to write a letter to the chairman of a voluntary organisation explaining forecasts of future membership. This report summarises the main points the examiners were looking for, and some common problems encountered.

1. The examiners expected an explanation that could be understood easily by an intelligent laymen, without being patronising. Candidates were expected to highlight the key points without going into excessive detail.
2. Many candidates simply repeated facts from the question. A good script required some explanation – for example, that the assumptions used in calculating the forecasts were based on past experience. Some candidates left all the explanation to the end of their letters, which was not an effective way to communicate.
3. A small table could helpfully be used to show the key numbers. Simply reproducing the table from the question was not effective.
4. Many candidates included irrelevant detail or speculation.
5. Many scripts contained significant amounts of unexplained jargon. For example, 'mortality' and 'lapse rate' were not appropriate terms in this context.
6. Most candidates were able to construct a letter fairly well, including an appropriate introduction and conclusion. However, some did not offer help with any further questions.

A possible letter is given below. It does not cover all the possible points, and is not intended to be a model solution. In practice a wide range of solutions was possible.

Alex Arbuthnott
Chairman
The Natural History Trust

16 April 2002

Dear Alex,

Membership estimates for The Natural History Trust

Many thanks for your letter of 30 March asking about my estimates of membership of the Trust for the years 2002 to 2004. I can confirm that, based on my assumptions, the estimates are correct, and I will explain in more detail how I arrived at them.

How the estimates are calculated

Membership of the Trust changes for three reasons. Every year, membership is increased by those who join, but reduced by those who die or who choose not to renew their subscriptions. The overall change in membership is the new members less those who die less those who do not renew.

Obviously we do not know how many people will fall into each category each year, so I have made some assumptions based on the Trust's future recruitment plans and past experience. For this purpose, it is helpful to split the membership between those under age 65 and those age 65 or over, because the membership pattern of each group is different.

In particular, although those aged 65 and over are much more likely to die during the year than younger members, they also tend to be more loyal to the Trust. Showing estimates for the two groups separately allows us to take such factors into account, as well as demonstrating the effects of your new recruitment strategy.

Why estimated membership is not increasing

The number of members aged 65 or over has been stable at around 5,000 for many years. The Trust recruits about 300 new members aged 65 or over a year, and about 100 existing members reach age 65. However, it loses the same number through a combination of deaths (150) and non-renewals (250). My estimates assume that this pattern will continue.

The recruitment drive in 2001 resulted in a large increase in the number of members under age 65 — from 2,500 to 5,000. From 2002 onwards we are also anticipating higher recruitment of new members than in the past — about 900 a year. However, the Trust also loses a relatively high proportion of members under age 65 each year.

Although very few members aged under age 65 die each year, younger members are much more likely to discontinue their membership. Each year, almost one in six of these members do not renew their membership, compared with one in twenty over-65s.

My estimates assume that around 900 new members will be recruited each year from 2002 onwards, but this number is exactly matched by 800 each year who discontinue membership, plus 100 each year who will reach age 65.

The higher membership as a result of last year's recruitment drive means that more members are likely to lapse each year. This in turn means that you need a higher ongoing level of recruitment just to maintain the total membership at the current level.

Conclusion

If my assumptions are realised in practice, from 2002 to 2004 new members will be almost exactly matched by deaths and non-renewals, both for those over 65 and those under 65. I suggest that we continue to monitor the situation, and review the estimates periodically in the light of experience.

If you would like any more information, please feel free to get in touch.

Yours sincerely

Peter Potter