



JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

2000

ENGLISH

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. Preface

Sixty thousand, four hundred and thirty nine (60,439) candidates sat English in the Junior Certificate in 2000. The numbers of candidates sitting at the three levels, Higher, Ordinary and Foundation, were as follows:

Level	Number Taking Level	% of Overall Cohort
Higher	37,548	62.1%
Ordinary	20,480	33.9%
Foundation	2,411	4.0%

The purpose of this report is to indicate how candidates at the three levels responded to the questions on the respective papers, to indicate areas where candidates performed well and areas where candidates encountered some difficulty. Recommendations on each of the levels are also made in this report. It is hoped that these recommendations will assist teachers and students in preparing for future Junior Certificate English examinations.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers taken this year and with the marking schemes devised for their marking. These marking schemes may be accessed via the Internet [www.irlgov.ie/educ].

This report is based on comments and recommendations made by assistant examiners, advising examiners and chief advising examiners in their final reports.

HIGHER LEVEL

2.1 Introduction

Candidates for the Junior Certificate Higher Level examination 2000 sat two papers. Each paper was marked out of a total of 180 marks.

Paper I tested the students in four areas: Reading, Personal Writing, Functional Writing, and Media Studies. Mark allocations were as follows:

Reading - 40

Personal Writing - 70

Functional Writing - 30

Media Studies - 40

Total - 180

Paper II tested the students in three areas: Drama, Poetry, and Fiction. Mark allocations were as follows:

Drama - 60

Poetry - 60

Fiction - 60

Total - 180

For each of the three genres being tested, candidates were directed to answer questions on an unseen text (30 marks) and then to write about text(s) they had studied during their course (30 marks).

2.2 Performance of Candidates

Thirty seven thousand, five hundred and forty eight (37,548) candidates sat the Junior Certificate, Higher Level English Examination in 2000.

The following grades were awarded:

A = 5.9%

B = 24.2%

C = 40.9%

D = 26.3%

E = 2.6%

F = 0.1%

NG = 0.0%

C+ = 71%

E - = 2.7%

See Appendices – Comparative Analysis of Results
Junior Certificate Higher Level

1998-2000

2.3 Analysis of Candidate Response

PAPER I

Reading

The passage set for this year's examination was an edited version of a newspaper article by Maeve Binchy. The passage was well received by candidates and did not present any particular difficulties.

High scoring answers featured clear points well expressed and supported by quotation and/or reference to the passage. Low scoring answers tended to simply list references with little or no explanation or comment.

Personal Writing

Generally, it was seen that the directions to candidates presented at the top of the Personal Writing section (i.e. a personal approach to the subject; an appropriate style; liveliness and a good choice of words; and organisation and accuracy) helped focus their writing.

Examiners agreed that the choice of titles offered this year gave sufficient scope to the candidates.

Most popular essay titles

3. My greatest fear.
5. Invisible for a day.
6. If only. . .

Titles that were popular

2. You arrive home from a party at 3 a.m. having promised your parents

you would be in by 11.30p.m. You overhear your parents' conversation. Write out in dialogue form what you have heard. You may give the conversation a relevant setting and, if you wish, intersperse the dialogue with unspoken observations of your own on what

is said.

4. Keeping secrets.
7. (response to visual stimulus) Write a composition beginning "I shall never forget that journey."
8. A friend who let me down **or** A friend who stood by me.

Least popular titles

1. Looking forward to things is always better than the reality. What do you think?

9. Write out the speech you would make for or against the motion "That the youth of today are cruel and unfeeling."
(speech)

Most students opted to write narrative responses or short stories in this section. Relatively few candidates presented argumentative responses, as is borne out by the position of the two explicitly argumentative titles in the order of popularity above.

Functional Writing

Once again, the presentation of directions to candidates at the head of this section helped focus their writing.

Many students opted to write an agony aunt's letter to a troubled teenage to fulfil their Functional Writing requirement. The stimulus letter was well used by candidates in their responses. The other popular choice in this section was the speech in honour of one's departing School Principal.

The least popular choice in this section was the "interview a poet or writer for your school magazine" task. Not only did this question demand a familiarity with the interview style, but it also required a measure of cultural literacy sufficient to write about a poet or writer. Even though candidates could have written about a poet or writer they had studied in preparation for the second paper of this examination, relatively few tapped into that resource.

Media Studies

The Media Studies question featured a page from a teenage magazine. The stimulus provided was bright, attractive, and accessible.

Most candidates were able to respond to the contents page in a personal way, and to articulate an opinion on the "usefulness" of teenage magazines. The questions that asked candidates to critically analyse and to compose editorials were the ones that proved most challenging. The conventions and register appropriate to writing an editorial seemed to present difficulty for some candidates. In writing their own editorial statements, some candidates employed creative modelling of the stimulus piece to good effect.

PAPER II

Drama

Extracts from *Othello* and from Synge's *Riders to the Sea* appeared on this year's paper. Candidates were asked to respond to one of these extracts and then to draw on the play they had studied as part of their course to answer one general question. Examiners found that most students opted for the Shakespearean extract.

The first two questions on the *Othello* extract generated high scoring answers. Candidates had little difficulty in characterising Desdemona and in articulating their feelings towards Othello. Candidates found some difficulty in the third question which required them to explain how the printed extract was dramatic. Since candidates only had to answer two questions on this extract, only a minority of them answered this question.

The character question on *Riders to the Sea* proved to be a popular, relatively high scoring choice. However, the second question's focus on the difference between the language of Synge's play and of modern life proved much more challenging. Candidates seemed to lack the critical vocabulary to tackle this question effectively. The stagecraft question that appeared as the third option in this section also caused some difficulty. Many candidates simply provided a list of props with little or no attempt to explain how those props would help create an appropriate atmosphere and setting for the *Riders to the Sea* extract.

In the general drama question, most candidates opted to write about the likelihood of an audience being sympathetically inclined to the main character of the play they had studied. The second question in this section focused on playwrights' ability to craft opening scenes capable of capturing the attention of their audiences. This question was far less popular than the other question offered in this section, and generated relatively few high scores.

Poetry

Phoebe Hesketh's *Clown* proved to be an accessible unseen poetry stimulus. Most candidates were able to identify qualities which made the clown a good entertainer. Likewise, most candidates were comfortable picking two images that they found effective and that appealed to them. The second question in this section, however, caused difficulty. Almost all students realized that by separating out the last five lines of the poem the poet was drawing our attention to a shift in tone. Some candidates failed to grasp the significance of the metaphor of the tightrope.

Both general questions in poetry proved challenging for candidates. Many of them focused on one aspect of the first question, ignoring its double focus (choose one poem which made you think and whose language you

liked). They either produced some good material on "made me think" and little material on "liked the language" or provided some very technical answers (copious references to alliteration, onomatopoeia, etc) with no evidence of personal response. The double focus of the second question in this section also caused some difficulty. Candidates were asked to compare poems they liked best and least, explaining their preferences. Many of them were familiar with the two poems chosen, understood and perhaps appreciated them very well, but did not seem to have adequate resources to compare them.

Fiction

Candidates were directed to answer on an edited extract from Hugh Leonard's *Home Before Night* in this section. Most candidates produced strong personal responses, earning high scores for both questions.

In the general question on fiction texts, most candidates opted to answer the character question. High scores were earned by candidates who described various aspects of a character and who traced that character's development at different stages, showing why they would/ would not like to be that character. Lower scores were earned by candidates who simply summarised the part a particular character played in the novel they had studied. Few candidates opted for the second question in this section. Of those who did, some found it difficult to explain why they found the ending of a particular short story satisfying.

2.4 General Comment

The Junior Certificate Higher Level examination proved to be successful with its candidate cohort. The papers were deemed to be candidate-friendly and accessible. The range and variety of the questions ensured an appealing choice, which was used to advantage by candidates.

Examiners were pleased with the standard of candidates' work in general. The vast majority of candidates displayed a thorough knowledge of texts and most displayed some degree of personal response in

their answers. Expression was commendable in most cases and there were sufficient examples of outstanding writing by candidates to indicate a high level of ability at the top of the range.

The examiners' final reports do refer to a number of deficiencies in candidates' answers. These are presented as recommendations for further improvement in Section 2.5 of this report.

5. Recommendations for Teachers and Students

The final reports of examiners provide some recommendations that may be useful to teachers and students as a practical guide in preparation for future Junior Certificate English, Higher Level examinations. These recommendations include the following:

- Candidates should support their answers more fully by a discriminating selection of quotation and reference
- Candidates should be capable of distinguishing between the various literary genres e.g. Drama and Fiction
- Candidates should be in a position to recognise and comment on the aesthetic aspects of language e.g. style, register, idiom etc.
- Candidates should be given frequent opportunities to write in a variety of forms and for a variety of audiences as outlined in the syllabus
- There is a continuing need to emphasise the technical aspects of language – spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing and syntax
- Further emphasis should be placed on aspects of examination technique such as time allocation for the different sections of the paper and appropriateness of answer length

ORDINARY LEVEL

3.1 Introduction

Candidates for the Junior Certificate Ordinary Level examination sat one paper, which was marked out of a total of 360 marks.

Candidates were asked to answer questions from six sections in this examination:

- Reading, Personal Writing, and Functional Writing were compulsory

- Media Studies was the fourth compulsory section this year.

- Answers to two sections of the remaining three sections - Poetry, Fiction, and Drama - were also required.

Mark allocations were as follows:

Reading - 60

Personal Writing - 60

Functional Writing - 60

Media Studies - 60

Poetry - 60 Answer on

Fiction - 60 2 of these

Drama - 60 3 sections

Total - 360

3.2 Performance of Candidates

Twenty thousand, four hundred and eighty (20,480) candidates sat the Junior Certificate, Ordinary Level English Examination in 2000.

The following grades were awarded:

A = 5.7%

B = 25.1%

C = 44.4%

D = 22.6%

E = 2.1%

F = 0.2%

NG = 0.0%

C+ = 75.2%

E - = 2.3%

See Appendices – Comparative Analysis of Results for
Junior Certificate Ordinary Level

1998-2000.

3.3 Analysis of Candidate Response

PAPER I

Reading

The extract set for this year's examination was taken from *The Bomb* by Julia Alvarez. It recalled the effect of the Cuban missile crisis on one girl's imagination.

Candidates scored well on most questions in this Reading section. Question C's requirement that candidates pick out five "American English" words from the passage caused difficulty for some candidates. Some of them chose words associated with America (e.g. New York, President Kennedy), rather than "American English" words. Some candidates lost marks on questions D and E because they did not support their answers with specific references to the passage. Overall, however, this passage proved to be congenial to students.

Personal Writing

Examiners agreed that the choice of titles offered this year gave sufficient scope to the candidates to display their writing skills. The pictorial title H, in particular, proved a stimulating essay prompt. The convention of presenting Junior Certificate Ordinary Level candidates with an essay title accompanied by a visual cue was continued on this year's paper and again proved very appealing to candidates.

Most popular essay titles

C The best time I ever had

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Titles that were popular

A My favourite place

B What frightens me

G My plans for Summer

H Pick any one drawing and imagine yourself in that situation.

Write your account of what happened.

Least popular titles

D Teachers – what I think of them

E Having Visitors.

Examiners found that those candidates whose work showed evidence of essay planning (brainstorming webs, skeleton plans etc) tended to score significantly higher than their counterparts who wrote without a plan.

Functional Writing

Candidates found both options in this section interesting and attractive. Examiners noted the level of audience awareness exhibited by candidates in their responses to this section.

In general, candidates who opted for Option A tended to achieve lower scores than their counterparts who chose Option B. Many candidates were unable to provide clear and accurate descriptions of how their favourite game is played. They also found it difficult to detail some rules of their favourite game.

Option B's cartoon stimulus attracted the majority of candidate responses. Examiners remarked that the reports candidates wrote in response to the cartoon were lively, interesting, and stylish in their inclusion of technical terms and vocabulary relevant to police work. In the main, candidates seemed to be well prepared for this question. Consequently, most earned relatively high marks for their reporting efforts.

Media Studies

This proved to be a challenging section for candidates. The stimulus provided was an information leaflet issued by the Department of Education and Science on "heavy schoolbags." The questions set in this section directed candidates to interpret the leaflet as an example of advertising copy.

Locating information in the text of the leaflet was relatively easy for candidates. Explaining how the "centrefold" of the leaflet was created and commenting on the attention-grabbing characteristics of the leaflet proved more difficult for some of them.

The last question in the section proved to be somewhat more challenging. A number of candidates did not support their answers by referring to materials studied by them in their course.

Poetry

Vernon Scannell's *Death of a Snowman* proved to be a whimsical, accessible unseen poetry stimulus. Examiners noted that most responses to this section were excellent, and were pleased that so many selected this option.

Candidates discerned that the poem's speaker was the snowman and recognised the changes that beset the snowman in the morning sun.

Elaborating on how the snowman was like a polar bear was one task that discriminated among candidates. So too was the instruction to explain two lines from the poem.

Most candidates responded enthusiastically to the last question in this section, which asked them to describe, to analyse, and to declare their preference for/ antipathy towards a poem they had studied. However, a number of candidates contented themselves with a mere narrating of the studied poem.

Fiction

Candidates were directed to answer on an edited extract from Derek Mahon's *Sammy* in this section.

Overall, the average standard of answering on this section was somewhat disappointing. Many candidates failed to recognise where Sammy's gang used to "hang out". Some candidates' answers to question B were rather short, with little analysis of Sammy's character. In question C, most candidates were able to explain what "dialogue" was in their own words, but many did not explain why a writer might use it.

Drama

This was the least popular section in terms of uptake. The dramatic extract was taken from Mike English's *Closed Circuit*, a futuristic play revolving around the possibility of regionalised computerised education. Questions on the extract's theme and the author's evocation of tension proved somewhat challenging for a number of candidates

Even though the exam extract developed into a hostage-taking scenario, some students were unable to appreciate how various stage effects contributed to the rising tension of the drama.

3.4 General Comment

The majority of candidates who sat the Junior Certificate English Ordinary Level examination were successful. The paper was regarded as candidate-friendly and accessible, and a very fair test of the cohort's ability.

The innovative Media Studies colour insert and the cartoon prompts in the Personal and Functional Writing sections were particularly appealing and candidates responded very well to them. Candidates also scored well in the Reading and Poetry sections but were not as successful in Drama and Fiction.

The examination was regarded overall by examiners as a particularly effective instrument for discriminating between the various levels of ability presenting for assessment. Candidates showed a significant level of personal response throughout.

The examiner's final reports refer to a number of deficiencies in candidates' answers. There are presented as recommendations for further improvement in Section 3.5 of this report.

3.5 Recommendations for Teachers and Students

The final reports of examiners provide some recommendations that may be useful to teachers and students as a practical guide in preparation for future Junior Certificate English Ordinary Level examinations. These recommendations include the following:

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop their answers to questions further by drawing on multiple textual clues to support their opinions
- Candidates should be presented with wide opportunities for writing exercises which would further develop their ability to select, order, and present relevant material with clarity
- Candidates should be encouraged to use the terminology of media studies in their answers to questions on the Media Studies section
- There is a continuing need to emphasise the technical aspects of language – spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing and syntax
- Further emphasis should be placed on aspects of examination technique such as time allocation for the different sections, appropriateness of answer length, and awareness of relative mark allocations for questions

FOUNDATION LEVEL

4.1 Introduction

Candidates for the Junior Certificate English Foundation Level examination sat one paper, which was marked out of a total of 360 marks.

Students were asked to answer questions from six sections in this examination:

- Reading, Personal Writing, and Functional Writing sections were compulsory
- Answers to three sections from the Fiction, Poetry, Drama, or Media Studies sections were also required.

Mark allocations were as follows:

Reading - 60

Personal Writing - 60

Functional Writing - 60

Fiction - 60 Answer on

Poetry - 60 3 of these

Drama - 60 4 sections

Media Studies - 60

Total - 360

4.2 Performance of Candidates

Two thousand, four hundred and eleven (2,411) candidates sat the Junior Certificate English Foundation Level Examination in 2000.

The following grades were awarded:

A = 10.0%

B = 24.9%

C = 36.2%

D = 21.4%

E = 4.5%

F = 2.2%

NG = 0.8%

C+ = 71.1%

E - = 7.5%

See Appendices – Comparative Analysis of Results for Junior Certificate Foundation Level 1998 – 2000.

4.3 Analysis of Candidate Response

Reading

The passage set for this year's examination was a Guard's talk on Road Safety. This section was well answered with most candidates attempting all parts. However, candidates tended to earn lower scores in

answering questions C and E which required acts of inferential rather than literal comprehension.

Personal Writing

Seven essay titles were offered in this section. Many of the titles provided linked with the Road Safety theme in the Reading section.

Most popular essay titles

B My Summer Job.

F My best present ever.

*G Then I realised that the
brakes weren't working!*

Continue the story, telling
what happened to you.

Titles that were popular

A Danger on the Roads.

C I like – *books* or *films* or *video games*.

D Guard: You've no light on your bike!

Cyclist: I er forgot!

Write out the rest of what the Guard and the Cyclist said.

E Clothes

Students found titles relating to their personal experience ("My best present ever" etc) more appealing than titles eliciting more discursive responses ("Danger on the Roads"), specific genre responses (dialogue between Guard and cyclist), or argumentative/persuasive responses ("I like– *books* or *films* or *video games*").

Functional Writing

Option A directed candidates to write a *description* of a pictured cross/ dolmen/ cannon. Some candidates crafted a precisely detailed description of the pictured artefacts as instructed. However, a number of

candidates failed to follow this instruction. In some cases these candidates gave an historic account of the dolmen or an account of how and when the cannon was used.

Option B directed candidates to write a speech welcoming a group of American students and informing them of places of interest and "things to see" in the locality. The pivotal word in the instruction was "locality." Some students lost marks when they focused their speech on their own school and failed to give details of "places of interest and things to see" in their *locality*.

Fiction

Candidates were directed to answer on a passage adapted from Michelle Magorian's *Goodnight Mister Tom*. The passage describes a young boy's first meeting with the unknown, forbidding Tom Oakley. Given the palpable tension and apprehension in the passage, it was no surprise that this was the most popular and best-answered of the four optional sections on the Foundation Level paper.

With the exception of a few, most candidates had neither difficulty in locating information nor in discriminating between and characterising the protagonists of this passage.

Poetry

Candidates answered well on this section. Examiners were pleasantly surprised to see so many attempt this option.

Question C was the only item in the section that caused difficulty - some candidates were unable to explain the phrase *half resembling* girls in their own words. Question E gave plenty of scope to candidates to show off their grasp of studied poems. The "star-rating" task, in particular, seemed to appeal to candidates.

Drama

This section was least popular with candidates. It proved quite difficult for a number of them even though *Toy Story 1* and *Toy Story 2* are relatively recent cinematic and video releases. Many candidates had some difficulty in identifying the "language of the

spaceman" (question A), in explaining what the term "voice-over" meant (question C), and in recognising the differences in reaction between the two characters featured in the extract (question D). Some candidates had difficulty in describing two characters from a play/film studied who were different from each other "in the way they *think, speak and act*" (question E).

Media Studies

Most candidates provided adequate descriptions of the two-part advertisement (question B). Some of the descriptions were particularly adept. However, a number of candidates were unable to differentiate between the "product" and "brand" being advertised (question A). Some candidates also found it difficult to explain the message underlying the captions "One for all" and "All for one". A number of candidates found it difficult to explain how the photographs featured on the examination insert helped make the advertisement more effective (question D).

4. General Comment

Though the total number sitting the Foundation Level paper has again fallen, it is certainly the case that this examination is fostering a genuine sense of achievement among its specific cohort of candidates.

The examination was regarded by examiners as a particularly effective instrument for discriminating between the various levels of ability presenting for assessment.

The candidates' obvious engagement with most of the material on the paper (particularly the Reading, Fiction, and Poetry sections) was particularly in evidence.

Candidates experienced some difficulty overall in coming to terms with tasks which required them to have some knowledge of terminology specific to particular sections.

The examiners final reports refer to this and to a number of other deficiencies in candidates' answers. These are

presented as recommendations for further improvement in Section 4.5 of this report.

4.5 Recommendations for Teachers and Students

The final reports of examiners provide some recommendations that may be useful to teachers and students as a practical guide in preparation for future Junior Certificate Foundation Level examinations. These recommendations include the following:

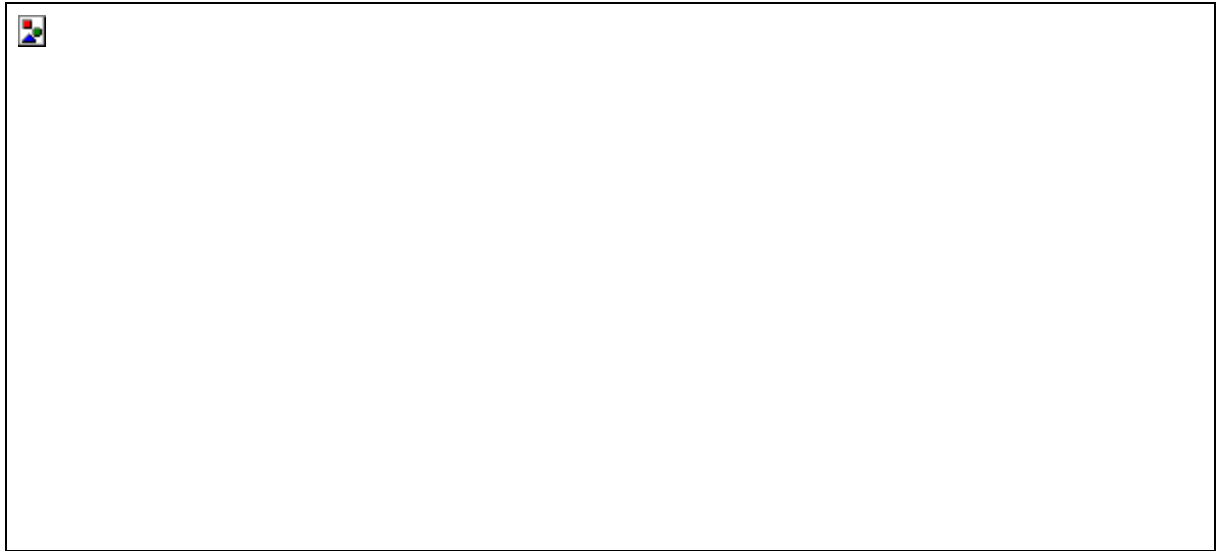
- Candidates should be given frequent opportunities for engaging in writing exercises which would gradually build up their ability to select, order, and present relevant facts with clarity
- There is continuing need to emphasise the technical aspects of language – spelling, grammar, punctuation, paragraphing and syntax
- Further emphasis should be placed on aspects of examination technique such as reading the instructions on the examination paper carefully, identifying the tasks set, recognising frequently used examination terms and developing answers with evidence from the texts on the paper or from material studied
- Candidates should develop further their knowledge of terminology specific to particular genres and areas of study e.g. media studies and drama

APPENDICES

Higher Level Grade Allocations 1998-2000

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGES (GRADES)										
1998 – 2000										
YEAR	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG	C+	D	E -
2000	5.9	24.2	40.9	26.3	2.6	0.1	0.0	71	26.3	2.7
1999	6.5	25.3	42.2	23.8	2.0	0.2	0.0	74	23.8	2.2

1998	6.4	22.4	39.6	28.7	2.7	0.2	0.0	68.4	28.7	2.9
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Ordinary Level Grade Allocations 1998-2000

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGES (GRADES)										
1998 – 2000										
YEAR	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG	C+	D	E -
2000	5.7	25.1	44.4	22.6	2.1	0.2	0.0	75.2	22.6	2.3
1999	6.6	25.6	43.5	22.1	2.0	0.3	0.0	75.7	22.1	2.3
1998	6.4	25.1	43.6	22.3	2.3	0.3	0.0	75.1	22.3	2.6



Foundation Level Grade Allocations 1998-2000

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PERCENTAGES (GRADES)

1998 – 2000

YEAR	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG	C+	D	E -
2000	10	24.9	36.2	21.4	4.5	2.2	0.8	71.1	21.4	7.5
1999	8.6	29.3	33.3	19.5	5.6	3	0.6	71.2	19.5	9.2
1998	11.9	30.7	31.2	18.9	3.5	2.5	1.2	73.8	18.9	7.2

