



**INNOVA JUNIOR COLLEGE**  
**JC 2 PRELIMINARY EXAMINATIONS 2**  
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**Higher 1**

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**GENERAL PAPER**

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Paper 2

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INSERT

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

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This document consists of **3** printed pages.



- 1 'Ethical' shopping is all the rage these days. Consuming with a conscience - once seen as the preserve of bearded-weirdy tree-hugging freaks and barely registering on the radar of corporate execs and politicians - has suddenly burst noisily into the mainstream. You can now buy a more socially or environmentally responsible version of just about anything: clockwork mobile phone chargers, organic anti-wrinkle cream, recycled silk designer handbags, solar-powered bird baths... 5
- 2 The so-called 'ethical consumerism' phenomenon is nothing new. Many people partake in the more positive pastime of trying to buy things that don't cause harm to people and the planet. Depending on your circumstances, this could include buying fair trade and organic food and drink, supporting local independent shops and farmers' markets, buying energy-efficient appliances, or shopping online for sweatshop-free clothes. 10
- 3 But we seem to have reached a tipping point. Although 'ethical' sales still only account for a tiny part of the global economy, analysts and companies firmly believe the future of retail will be green, and are rebranding and repositioning themselves accordingly. Rob Harrison from Ethical Consumer magazine has been charting this trend: 'The big companies have moved into the ethical market defensively. They seem convinced it will become dominant in developed economies - there'll be a broad ethical mainstream with most players guaranteeing basic ethical standards, with a super-ethical niche sitting on top.' But though sustainable shopping is becoming big business, we shouldn't pop the organic champagne corks just yet. 15
- 4 For a start, we should be wary of the claims being made. Irish rocker Bono, ever the self-appointed spokesperson for charitable causes, recently pontificated that: 'Shopping is politics. You vote every time you spend money.' The view that you can spend your way to a sustainable world is echoed in much of the ethical shopping sector's marketing. New Consumer, which purports to be the 'ultimate ethical lifestyle magazine', enthuses that: 'creating a world that works for everyone has never been easier. It lies in your simple shopping decisions and lifestyle habits!' Steady on now. It would be great if this were true; but it isn't. 20  
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- 5 In fact, what ethical consumerism can accomplish is limited in many different ways. Of course no-one wants to undermine the hard work, dedication and real progress of the many pioneers who have made consuming with a conscience possible. What they have achieved is amazing. But if we do not face up to the limitations of a consumer-driven approach to solving the world's problems, openly debate the contradictions and shortcomings that are becoming increasingly clear, and refocus our attentions on collective political action, we risk heading down a very dangerous diversion that takes us away from the route towards genuine global justice. 30
- 6 The problem with the concept of 'ethical consumerism' is that it's something of an oxymoron. The dictionary definition of 'consume' is 'to destroy by or like fire or disease: to cause to vanish'. A consumer is 'a person who squanders, destroys, or uses up'. So we may be trying to do it in an 'ethical' way (what's 'ethical' is of course subjective, but let's not even go there right now) but often we are still engaged in a destructive activity. And consumerism is indeed destroying the planet. The fatal flaw in treating consumer-led growth as the main indicator of economic success in industrialized countries is that it assumes infinite growth is possible, and doesn't take into account environmental and social limits. As a result, we are already well into the red, ecologically. The oil, water, land, soil, clean air and mineral resources we depend upon are under severe pressure or actively running out. It would take more than five planets to sustain the world's current population at US consumption levels. 35  
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- 7 We need to change the entire structure of our exploitative, wasteful, resource-intensive economy; and that includes buying much less stuff. Of course, purchasing more sustainable versions of the things we actually need has to form part of the solution. No-one's arguing against low-energy lightbulbs. 45
- 8 But so much of the ethical consumption boom focuses on luxury goods: fair trade roses grown in

- huge hothouses next to Kenya's Lake Naivasha, sucking up precious water resources and then being air-freighted to Northern supermarkets; pointless gadgets such as solar-powered cappuccino whisks; silver cufflinks handmade in Mexico, screaming 'guilt without the guilt!'. Their main impact is to make the shopper feel good – 'I'm doing something for the planet!' - without having to change their lifestyle one bit, while the companies laugh all the way to the bank. 50
- 9 In fact, the rapid conversion of big business to all things ethical is not just about exploiting a lucrative new market and making efficiency savings - it is also a self-preservation strategy. As the science of climate change and evidence of shocking corporate practices in the Majority World have become undeniable, the writing is slowly materializing on the boardroom wall. How to avoid being broken up, regulated, eco-taxed, boycotted? Be one step ahead of the game and show you're doing the right thing without the need for governments to resort to any extreme, potentially profit-curbing measures. 55 60
- 10 One way is for companies to do what is known as 'choice editing' which is the new industry buzzword. Quite simply, unethical options are removed from the market, 'edited out' by the company, reducing consumer choice in pursuit of the greater good. How do you stop people buying energy intensive incandescent lightbulbs? Just don't offer them as an option to consumers. It's as simple as that. The problem is that this approach relies on the company to really do what is most ethical, which from time to time will inevitably contradict what will make them money. So it's possible that the best option for the environment would be not to buy a particular item from Marks & Spencer at all, but to buy it second-hand, or maybe borrow it, or even - are you sitting down for this? - to go without it completely. Given that the company exists to sell stuff, it's hard to imagine 'don't buy this' appearing as one of the edited options. 65 70
- 11 The voluntary nature of 'responsible' business is another severe limitation. It turns out that the boom in organics, far from boosting small-scale sustainable farming around the world, is industrializing the sector, squeezing the small farmers out and watering down organic standards. Fair trade is increasingly driven, not by the needs of poor producers, but the demands of big business. 'When fair trade cotton came on the market, you couldn't get the stuff,' reveals Paul Monaghan, head of ethics and sustainable development at the Co-operative Group. 'Marks & Spencer went out and bought the whole lot. When fair trade roses came out, Sainsbury's got them. We were all fighting over the roses.' 75
- 12 So as a means to change the world, the ethical consumerist approach is a blunt and imprecise tool. It is most effective when used collectively and strategically. Fair trade would not have got into the public consciousness - and the supermarkets - without dedicated campaigning by thousands of people in their local communities. But if we give ethical consumers too much power, if we believe that the moral issues are black and white, if we get seduced by the idea that the market will respond to our ethical and environmental concerns, adapt accordingly and somehow the woes of the world will be solved, then we are making a huge mistake. 80 85
- 13 It is certainly a big mistake not to face up to the scale of change that's required. Surviving the multiple impending catastrophes that our throwaway lifestyles have triggered will involve a seismic shift in the way we live our lives. We must move away from limitless consumer-driven growth and towards a sustainable, low-carbon model that meets everyone's needs through more connected communities rather than gleaming shopping malls. Sometimes our most ethical shopping choice will be to buy nothing; to embrace the idea that less can be more. But this is the one message that is not coming through clearly - from NGOs, governments, business and the media. And this particular eco-bullet is one we now have to bite. 90