JOINT EXAMINATION BOARD
EXAMINERS' REPORT ON PAPER P3, 1992

This year's 'general' drafting paper represented a departure from previous years' papers in that there was no choice of question. As such, the examiners felt that a more complex question was in order, consistent of course with the subject matter being comprehensible by all candidates, irrespective of their academic discipline. A few candidates obviously thought, as evidenced by their notes to the examiner, that the question was far too difficult; one such candidate (apparently a chemist or biochemist) achieved one of the highest marks awarded and passed handsomely! The majority of candidates, in fact, clearly understood the subject matter and included somewhere a claim directed to what the examiners considered to be the principal inventive step, namely the supply of actuating fluid through the hollow tether line, but relatively few included that feature in their main claim thus, in most cases, producing a claim that read on to the prior art and/or completely missed the point. Candidates who did this had little prospect of achieving a pass mark.

The examiners were looking for a main claim reciting the following features:

a) a plug for fitting to an end of a hollow tether line and adapted to be releasably inserted into a sea-bed socket;

b) the plug having means for attachment to the end of the hollow tether line;

c) the plug having an expanded and a contracted state;

d) the plug being arranged to move to its expanded state when fully inserted in the socket;

e) the plug being arranged to be returned to its contracted state upon the supply of fluid down the tether line.

Candidates who additionally required the tether line itself to be part of the apparatus claimed were not unduly penalised.

The majority of marks for the subsidiary claims were allocated for claims directed to:

a) the plug comprising a collet movable between an expanded and contracted state by an internal member;

b) the collet facing upwardly;

c) support surfaces, with an intermediate cam surface, for the expanded and contracted state of the collet arms;

d) the collet carrying a piston actuable by fluid supplied down the tether line;

e) the drawings.

Such claims required not only a recitation of the various integers concerned, but also recitation of the functional and/or structural inter-relationship between them. Whilst many candidates succeeded in listing those integers, very few displayed an ability to define the relationship between them.

As was to be expected, most candidates tackled the European introduction reasonably well, but most gave little thought to characterising the 'statement of invention' with respect to the prior art discussed in the question. Futhermore, few candidates considered and identified the subsidiary technical problems solved by the individual sub-claims. The mechanical process of providing basis for the subsidiary claims does not attract marks but marks are earned by stating, where appropriate, the advantages that accrue from the subject matter of those claims.

It is considered that the important features in an invention such as that contained in this question can be claimed quite concisely, and that the invention can be introduced in relation to the prior art in a brief manner. The physical process of writing an answer should not take long, and candidates would be well advised to ensure that they have thoroughly understood the invention, including the important subsidiary features, and identified their significance before they start to write their answer.

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