

## Paper 2 Question 5 Practice

Read the following article from *The Guardian* and then answer the Question 5 that follows.

### Sleeve Tattoos Are Now A Hipster Habit *Comment is Free, The Guardian (2014)*

"You know this is permanent?" the sceptical tattooist says. It's 1999 and I'm in a tattoo parlour in Mill Hill armed with a copy of *British Vogue* to anaesthetise my brain. I'm having a full sleeve done.

Sadly, the word "permanent" has no resonance when you're 20. Barbed wire effect around the wrist? Hokusai-style wave design resembling the marbling in medium strength Castello cheese? Big black paisleys pieced together like a children's jumbo jigsaw into a faux armour plate? Indigo slashes over smeared blocks of red, purple, pink and green? I have them all. On one tattoo.

I now think of my sleeve as a form of socially legitimised self-harm, done at a time when I was agonising about my career. A self-sabotaging former child prodigy and writer whose physical prowess is part of the package, and whose best days are behind them by their 20s? The sleeve had to be done. And since then more and more people have made the same decision, although probably for very different reasons. Fifa has just released photos of the England World Cup squad, revealing that four players have had the mental acuity to pick up on the sleeve trend just five years after it first peaked, inspired by David Beckham. Justin Bieber has, inevitably, completed a sleeve too.

But I no longer believ. Underneath my ink smears are raised scars; the whole thing bubbles up and itches in summer. Even in a tailored suit it peeps out like mould. Blue ink has seeped between the layers of skin and spread into my armpit. My generation will be at the NHS at 80 getting our gammy legs seen to while doctors try to find a vein under the faded, stretched, misshapen detritus of our unartistic body art; a postmodern mash-up of badly translated Chinese words, bungled Latin quotes, dolphins, roses, anchors, faces of favoured children or pets, and Japanese wallpaper designs.

Nearly all world cultures have had tattoos. They represent adulthood rites, warrior marks, artistry and beauty, tribal identification, victories won, journeys undertaken. They have represented both belonging and marginality; individuals on the edge, pillaging, hustling, gifting. Now they are a hipster habit, a sheeplike folly, a permanent pretension. You can stumble into a Magaluf tat parlour in a drunken stupor and have Snoopy inked on your boob.

My sleeve took three sessions of nine hours each and felt like what it was: a needle loaded with ink jamming into my skin at high speed. It vibrates exhilaratingly through your bones, zings into the flesh, numbs you out, exhausts you later, sweats blood, swells up. A one-inch tattoo across the nervy, fatty pad at the bottom of my spine hurt a million times more than the sleeve.

Women with full sleeves are common now, as in plentiful. In my day we were common as in trashy. "That's your warrior side," my female friends said. No – for my martial spirit comes from within. A few years ago I went to the Royal Free hospital to talk about removal. The doctor was unwilling. "You did a big, bold thing in getting it done," he said. "Now be big and bold in living with it."

### Question 5:

**'Tattoos are a way of expressing our individuality but can be regrettable in later life. We should make more serious decisions before making permanent changes to our bodies.'**

**Write an article for a magazine or website in which you argue your point of view on this statement.**

**[40 marks]**