ANSWER KEY — 23 NOVEMBER 2026

Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
D	A	C	B	D	C	A	A	B	C
Q11	**Q12**	**Q13**	**Q14**	**Q15**	**Q16**	**Q17**	**Q18**	**Q19**	**Q20**
B	C	B	D	B	A	D	C	D	C

READING COMPREHENSION

Q1 **D** *Central claim* HARD

The passage opens with the maze feat and the headline question 'whether a blob could think', then says the question 'points us in the wrong direction'. The second paragraph explains the feat by a feedback rule: tubes with more flow thicken, tubes with little flow are abandoned, and 'nothing in the cell compares routes'. The third paragraph applies the same rule to the Tokyo network, and the last paragraph states the thesis outright: 'intelligence' is the wrong word, and the real surprise is 'how much can be done without thinking at all'. The fourth option captures both halves of this claim, the mechanism and its lesson. The first option asserts the very reasoning the author denies. The second option endorses the label 'intelligent' that the final paragraph rejects as flattery. The third option adopts the comparison the author calls 'tempting' and then sets aside, and the passage never ranks the two experiments against each other.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The second option tempts because the passage does praise the rail-like network, but the author uses that result to reject the word 'intelligent', not to earn it.

Q2 **A** *Detail (mechanism)* MED

The second paragraph states the mechanism plainly: 'Tubes that carry more flow grow thicker; tubes that carry little flow thin out and are eventually abandoned.' A dead end carries little traffic, so it is not reinforced and the passage says such branches 'starve'. The first option restates this exactly. The second option attributes recognition and deliberate choice to the cell, which the author explicitly denies: 'Nothing in the cell compares routes or represents the maze.' The fourth option makes the same error in another form, describing a comparison followed by a rejection, whereas the author insists the solution 'is not computed and then executed'. The third option invents a cause; the passage mentions that the cell contains many nuclei only to describe what the organism is, and never links the number of nuclei in a tube to its survival. Only the first option rests on the mechanism the passage actually describes.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The fourth option tempts because the end result looks like a choice between routes, but the passage says no comparison ever takes place inside the cell.

Q3 **C** *Paragraph function* ELITE

The third paragraph begins, 'The same rule explains a later and more striking demonstration', so its first job is to extend the feedback account from the maze to a harder case, the network linking cities around Tokyo. It then raises a conclusion, 'It is tempting to conclude that the mould is a better planner than the engineers', only to replace it with 'the fairer conclusion': both were solving the same physical problem, and a feedback rule can reach a good answer 'without anyone holding the problem in mind'. The third option captures both moves, extension and refusal of the flattering comparison. The first option states the very conclusion the author labels tempting and then rejects. The second option is unsupported; nothing suggests the maze result was weak, and the rail case is called 'more striking', not more valid. The fourth option is never proposed; the passage mentions algorithms borrowed by computer scientists, not organisms designing railways.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The first option is the trap: it quotes the paragraph's own words, but those words are the view the author raises in order to reject it.

Q4 **B** *Vocabulary in context* MED

The sentence reads: 'A tube on the short path between two food sources carries the most traffic, so it is reinforced, while the long detours and dead ends starve.' 'Starve' is set against 'reinforced', and both refer to flow. The sentence before explains what happens to tubes that carry little flow: they 'thin out and are eventually abandoned'. So 'starve' is used figuratively for branches that receive too little flow, weaken and are given up, which is the second option. The first option takes the word literally, as death from lack of nutrients, but the passage is describing flow through tubes, not nourishment of nuclei. The third option adds deliberate denial by a choosing cell, which contradicts the claim that nothing in the cell compares routes. The fourth option confuses the branches with the organism's search; a dead end may simply be a dead end, and the word describes what happens to the tube, not whether food was found.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The first option tempts because 'starve' ordinarily means lacking food, but here the word describes a tube losing flow, the opposite of being 'reinforced'.

Q5 **D** *Weaken (causal mechanism)* ELITE

The author's explanation is causal: tubes that carry more flow grow thicker, and because the short path carries the most traffic, it is reinforced. Flow comes first and thickening follows. If tubes on the shortest route thickened before they carried more flow than the others, the proposed order of cause and effect would be reversed, and something other than the flow feedback would have to be selecting

the route. That strikes at the heart of the account, so the fourth option weakens it most. The first option concerns speed; the passage already says the result comes 'within hours', and a slow feedback rule is perfectly consistent with the explanation. The second option is irrelevant, since the argument is about how Physarum works, not about all single-celled organisms. The third option, about how engineers built the rail system, bears on the human side of the comparison and leaves the mould's mechanism untouched.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The second option tempts because it seems to make the mould's feat less general, but the author's claim concerns the mechanism in this organism, which it does not touch.

Q6 **C** *Main point* HARD

The passage moves in four steps. It describes the tapping study, names the effect as the curse of knowledge, argues that the standard remedy of imagining the reader's position is 'weak in practice' because the curse operates 'precisely on our ability to do this', and recommends instead 'not empathy but evidence': watching a real reader, asking students to explain a concept back. The third paragraph sums up: 'the cure for a failed simulation is to stop simulating and observe.' The third option states this core argument. The first option contradicts the final paragraph, which says, 'This does not mean that experts should not teach.' The second option misreads the study; the tappers misjudged what listeners could hear, not their own musical rhythm. The fourth option is exactly the remedy the author calls 'weak in practice', since experts imagining a novice tend to imagine a slightly less informed version of themselves.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The fourth option tempts because it sounds like sensible advice, but it is the very remedy the passage argues fails against this particular bias.

Q7 **A** *Detail (cause)* MED

The first paragraph gives the reason directly: 'They could hear the melody in their heads while they tapped, and they could not imagine hearing the knocks without it.' The first option restates this. The author also rules out the second option in so many words: 'The tappers were not careless.' Nothing in the passage mentions the speed of tapping. The third option shifts the cause to the listeners, but the passage describes the songs as 'well-known', and the explanation it offers concerns the tappers' own inner experience, not the listeners' knowledge. The fourth option imputes a motive, a desire to appear gifted, that the passage never mentions; the error it describes is cognitive, a failure to simulate another mind, not a matter of vanity. This is why the author can generalise the case into the curse of knowledge, which affects teachers and manual writers who have no wish to show off.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The second option tempts because overconfidence often goes with carelessness, but the author expressly states that the tappers 'were not careless'.

Q8 **A** *Application* HARD

The third paragraph recommends 'evidence' over 'empathy', and gives a specific example: 'Teachers who ask students to explain a concept back in their own words, rather than asking whether everything is clear, discover gaps.' Asking students to restate the central idea is that practice, so the first option is what the author would endorse. The second option is the very alternative the author rejects, asking whether everything is clear, because students may not know what they missed. The third option is a form of simulation, imagining being a novice, which the second paragraph calls weak in practice. The fourth option is the subtle trap: a senior expert is, by the passage's own logic, even more affected by the curse, since 'expertise... feeds it'. Another expert's reading would therefore be the least reliable check, not the best one.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The fourth option tempts because expert review sounds rigorous, but the final paragraph says expertise feeds the curse, so a second expert shares the blind spot.

Q9 **B** *Vocabulary in context* EASY

The sentence says that 'merely being warned about the bias often does little to remove it'. To remove a bias here means to make it go away or eliminate it. 'Dispel' means to drive away or make something such as a doubt, fear or false belief disappear, so it fits the sentence without any change of meaning, and the second option is correct. 'Explain' would change the claim entirely: the passage is not saying that a warning fails to explain the bias, but that it fails to get rid of it. 'Spread' gives almost the opposite sense, as if the warning failed to make the bias more common. 'Disguise' means to hide something while it remains present, which is not what the author says the warning fails to do. Reading the word against the paragraph's point, that the curse survives our efforts to imagine our way past it, confirms that the sense needed is elimination.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The first option tempts students who link 'being warned about' with understanding, but the sentence concerns getting rid of the bias, not explaining it.

Q10 **C** *Function of a claim* ELITE

The final paragraph argues that mastery makes steps 'automatic', so they 'drop out of the explanation without the explainer realising that anything is missing'. It then states that expertise 'feeds' the curse and closes with the practical upshot: an expert's 'confidence that an explanation is clear is the one judgement about it they should trust least'. The claim about feeding therefore works as the reason for this concluding advice, which is the third option. The first option is explicitly ruled out by 'This does not mean that experts should not teach.' The second option reverses the paragraph's relation to the earlier cure; the irony explains why observation is needed, it does not retract it. The fourth option draws an unsupported inference about the tappers; the passage says nothing about their training, and the curse in the study arose from knowing the tune, not from musical expertise.

Examiner's note — the trap: The first option tempts because 'feeds the curse' sounds like an indictment of experts, but the next sentence explicitly says experts should still teach.

CRITICAL REASONING

Q11 **B** *Main conclusion* MED

The author concedes that multiplexes offer comfort and that audiences chose them, but argues the defence is 'wrong about what was lost'. The loss is identified as a space where people of 'very different incomes sat in the same room', a 'shared public experience'. The final paragraph proposes remedies: planning rules requiring low-priced seats or support for community screens 'would address the real loss'. The second option combines the diagnosis and the remedy, so it is the conclusion. The first option is explicitly rejected: 'None of this requires preserving every crumbling hall as a monument', and the nostalgic details are mentioned only as the usual, inadequate case. The third option contradicts the passage, which says the old halls 'could not compete' and that audiences chose multiplexes freely. The fourth option is the objection the third paragraph answers; the author says access to films 'was never the point'.

Examiner's note — the trap: The first option tempts because the passage opens with posters and balconies, but the author dismisses nostalgia and expressly denies that every hall must be preserved.

Q12 **C** *Assumption* HARD

The third paragraph replies to the objection that films are cheaper than ever to watch. The author concedes the film is 'the same film' but says 'it is not the same event', and that what disappears is 'a shared public experience', one of the ways a divided city learns 'to react as one audience'. For this to count as a loss rather than a mere change of habit, the author must assume that reacting together as a mixed audience has value for a city beyond the pleasure of the film itself. That is the third option. The first option is unnecessary; the argument grants that it may be 'the same film' and does not turn on picture quality. The second option is too strong; the argument works even if many people still visit cinemas. The fourth option is contrary to the objection, which the author accepts, that films are now cheaper to watch than ever.

Examiner's note — the trap: The first option tempts because phones feel like a lesser experience, but the author concedes it is 'the same film' and locates the loss in the shared event.

Q13 **B** *Weaken* HARD

The second paragraph claims that the single screen 'was one of the few urban spaces' in which people of very different incomes sat together, and that the multiplex now sorts audiences 'into different buildings'. The claim implies that the mixing was still happening when multiplexes arrived, so that their arrival caused the sorting. If wealthier viewers had stopped attending single screens long before multiplexes, the cross-class audience the author describes had already gone, and the multiplex did not destroy it. That is the second option. The first option strengthens the point that multiplexes are priced for a narrower band. The third option gives a reason halls closed, but the author already concedes their commercial weakness and argues about what was lost, not why. The fourth option restates the concession, made in the opening and second paragraphs, that the change is 'correct about comfort'.

Examiner's note — the trap: The fourth option tempts because it favours multiplexes, but the author already grants their superior comfort, so the fact leaves the argument untouched.

Q14 **D** *Strengthen (policy)* HARD

The final paragraph proposes planning rules requiring new complexes to keep a share of low-priced seats, or support for converting old halls into community screens, claiming these 'would address the real loss', the disappearance of a space where incomes mix. The strongest support would be evidence that such a rule in fact produces mixed audiences. The fourth option supplies exactly that: where low-priced seats were required, viewers of very different incomes shared screenings. The first option is a reason to convert halls into shops, which works against the community-screen proposal. The second option documents fondness, which is the nostalgia the author says 'is not an argument'. The third option concerns the cost of streaming, which bears on access to films, a point the author explicitly sets aside: 'access to films was never the point.' Only the fourth option shows the remedy reaching the specific loss the argument identifies.

Examiner's note — the trap: The second option tempts because it shows public support, but fond memory is the nostalgia the author dismissed and says nothing about whether the policy works.

Q15 **B** *Function of a phrase* ELITE

The phrase follows a description of a city that 'lets its common spaces disappear one by one, each closure justified by consumer choice'. Each choice is individual and freely made, yet together they produce the end of shared spaces, an outcome that no single chooser intended or endorsed. The phrase therefore points to the gap between many separate decisions and their combined result, which is the second option. The first option introduces deception; the passage says audiences chose 'freely' and blames no one for misleading them. The third option reverses the phrase's role; it is offered against the defence that consumer choice settles the matter, not as a concession to it. The fourth option is too sweeping; the author proposes targeted planning rules alongside the market, and explicitly rejects preserving every hall, so the argument does not say markets should never decide which spaces survive.

Examiner's note — the trap: The fourth option tempts because the phrase criticises leaving the matter to the market, but the author asks for limited planning rules, not an end to market choice.

Q16 **A** *Main conclusion* MED

The argument answers critics who judge sugar taxes by consumer behaviour alone. It uses the UK levy, which charged manufacturers by sugar content with thresholds, to show that reformulation removed sugar 'before any shopper paid a penny of tax'. The final paragraph states the conclusion: a single-rate levy gives 'no reason to change a recipe', and 'the design of the tax, and not merely its existence, determines whether it improves health'. The first option captures that conclusion. The second option takes the critics' view and adds a remedy the author never proposes; the author argues that the regressivity objection is changed by a tiered design. The third option misstates the evidence; the passage credits manufacturers' reformulation, not a sharp fall in shoppers' purchases. The fourth option is rejected outright: the measure of the tax 'is therefore not how much revenue it raises' but how much sugar leaves the supply.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The third option tempts because it cites the UK levy, but the passage says the levy worked through producers' recipes, not through shoppers buying less.

Q17 D *Assumption* HARD

The third paragraph says that a tiered levy reduces the sugar 'in drinks bought by everyone, and the poorer households that drink more of them gain the most from the change'. The step from 'drink more of them' to 'gain the most' needs the assumption that the health benefit of reduced sugar grows with the amount of sweetened drink a household consumes. If the benefit were the same whatever the quantity, heavier drinkers would not gain more. That is the fourth option. The first option concerns what would happen under a flat tax, which is not needed for a claim about who gains under reformulation. The second option is far too strong; the argument says only that poorer households gain the most, not that wealthier ones are unaffected. The third option is not required either: even if reformulated drinks cost a little more, poorer households could still gain the most in health, which is the benefit the sentence describes.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The third option tempts because price rises would hurt the poor, but the claim concerns health gains from less sugar, which survive a modest price change.

Q18 C *Weaken* HARD

The argument's central claim is that a tiered levy improves health by making sugar 'disappear from the supply', and that the right measure of success is how much sugar leaves the drinks. This assumes that sugar removed from drinks is not simply replaced from other sources. If buyers of reformulated drinks made up the sugar elsewhere and their total intake stayed the same, reformulation would not improve health, and the author's measure of success would be the wrong one. That is the third option. The first option is predicted by the passage, which says a well-designed levy 'may raise less than forecast precisely because it is succeeding'. The second option says only that some manufacturers paid the higher rate; the passage claims 'many', not all, reformulated. The fourth option agrees with the author's warning that flat-rate levies disappoint, and so supports the argument rather than weakening it.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The first option tempts because missed revenue sounds like failure, but the author predicts exactly this as a sign that the levy is succeeding.

Q19 D *Parallel reasoning* ELITE

The final paragraph reasons that a charge levied at one rate regardless of a harmful attribute (sugar) gives the payer no reason to reduce that attribute, and that only a charge which 'falls as the sugar falls' creates such a reason. The fourth option has the same structure: a flat road tax gives no reason to buy cleaner cars, while a tax that falls with emissions does. The harmful attribute changes from sugar to emissions; the logic of a graded incentive is identical. The first option is about deterrence failing because enforcement is weak, and its remedy is more inspectors, not a graded charge. The second option compares how two groups respond to the same price, a point about sensitivity, not design. The third option is the strongest trap because it also criticises a flat charge, but its complaint is fairness between households, not the absence of an incentive to reduce use.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The third option tempts because it also objects to a flat charge, but its ground is fairness to small families, not the missing incentive to change behaviour.

Q20 C *Function of a remark* HARD

The remark appears within the claim that the measure of a sugar tax is 'not how much revenue it raises' but how much sugar disappears. A reader might take a shortfall in revenue as proof that the tax failed. The author anticipates this reading and turns it around: if manufacturers reformulate below the thresholds, less tax is collected precisely because the levy has achieved its aim. The third option describes this pre-emptive reinterpretation. The first option misreads the remark as a confession of failure, which is the very reading the author resists. The second option draws a conclusion about budgeting that the passage never draws; the author does not discuss fiscal planning. The fourth option reverses the logic, since setting the tax to guarantee revenue would treat revenue as the goal, which the author has just denied. The remark thus serves to redefine success, not to report a shortfall.

> **Examiner's note — the trap:** The first option tempts because the remark mentions raising less than forecast, but the author presents the shortfall as evidence of success, not a failure.

RAPID FIRE — ANSWERS

1. What is the scientific name of the slime mould in the maze passage? — **Physarum polycephalum**

2. Per the passage, how many brains or neurons does the slime mould have? — **None**

3. In its foraging form, the slime mould is one cell containing many what? — **Nuclei**

4. Where is food placed in the maze experiment described? — **At the two exits**

5. Researchers from which country reported the maze result? — **Japan**

6. When was the maze result reported, according to the passage? — **Around the turn of this century**

7. What question did headlines ask after the maze result? — **Whether a blob could think**

8. How does the mould's fluid interior move through its tubes? — **Back and forth in rhythmic pulses**

9. What happens to tubes that carry more flow? — **They grow thicker**

10. What happens to tubes that carry little flow? — **They thin out and are abandoned**

11. Which tube in the maze carries the most traffic? — **The one on the short path between the food sources**

12. Per the passage, does anything in the cell compare routes? — **No**

13. The author says the maze solution is not computed and then what? — **Executed**

14. What food was laid out in the pattern of cities around Tokyo? — **Oat flakes**

15. The mould's network resembled which real-world system? — **The Tokyo region's rail system**

16. In what two qualities did the mould's network resemble the rail system? — **Efficiency and resilience**

17. Over what period was the Tokyo rail design refined, per the passage? — **Decades**

18. Which conclusion about the mould and engineers does the author call 'tempting'? — **That the mould is a better planner**

19. What does the author call the 'fairer conclusion'? — **Both solved the same physical problem**

20. Which word does the author say is the wrong one for the mould? — **Intelligence**

21. The author says calling the mould clever does what to it? — **Flatters it**

22. The processes that solve such problems are mindless yet not what? — **Random**

23. Who has borrowed the mould's rule to write algorithms? — **Computer scientists**

24. For what have those algorithms been written? — **Designing networks**

25. Per the author, what is the real surprise of the maze? — **How much can be done without thinking**

26. In the slime-mould passage, 'starve' is set against which word? — **Reinforced**

27. What kind of rule does the slime-mould passage say solves the maze? — **A feedback rule**

28. Was the Tokyo demonstration earlier or later than the maze? — **Later**

29. What did the mould withdraw from in the maze? — **The dead ends**

30. Within what time does the mould stretch its tube along the shortest route? — **Within hours**

31. In the tapping study, what did tappers tap out? — **The rhythm of a well-known song**

32. Where and when did the much-cited tapping study take place? — **Stanford, 1990**

33. What did tappers predict about listeners? — **That they would succeed far more often**

34. What did listeners hear in the tapping study? — **Only knocks**

35. How many songs did listeners identify, per the passage? — **Very few**

36. Were the tappers careless, according to the author? — **No**

37. What could tappers hear in their heads while tapping? — **The melody**

38. What name do psychologists give the effect in the tapping passage? — **The curse of knowledge**

39. Define the curse of knowledge as the passage does. — **Difficulty simulating the mind of someone who does not know**

40. Which two things is the curse usually invoked to explain? — **Bad teaching and impenetrable manuals**

41. What usual remedy does the passage call 'weak in practice'? — **Putting yourself in the reader's shoes**

42. Why is that remedy weak, per the author? — **The curse acts on the very ability to do it**

43. When experts imagine a novice, whom do they tend to imagine? — **A slightly less informed version of themselves**

44. Does a warning about the bias reliably remove it, per the passage? — **No, it often does little**

45. What works better than empathy, according to the author? — **Evidence**

46. What does a writer learn from in ten minutes, per the passage? — **Watching a real reader stumble**

47. What should teachers ask students to do instead of asking if all is clear? — **Explain the concept back in their own words**

48. The curse is a failure of what, per the author? — **Simulation**

49. What is the cure for a failed simulation? — **Stop simulating and observe**

50. What happens to steps a master once took with effort? — **They become automatic and unnoticed**

51. Per the passage, expertise does not merely coexist with the curse; it does what? — **Feeds it**

52. Which judgement should experts trust least? — **Their confidence that an explanation is clear**

53. Does the author say experts should not teach? — **No**

54. In the tapping passage, 'remove' could be replaced by which word? — **Dispel**

55. What does 'dispel' mean? — **To drive away or make disappear**

56. What does 'impenetrable' mean, as applied to manuals? — **Impossible to understand**

57. What does 'self-scrutiny' mean? — **Close examination of oneself**

58. In the cinema passage, which three nostalgic details are listed? — **Posters, the balcony, the interval samosa**

59. How were the old posters made, per the passage? — **Hand-painted**

60. What do defenders of the change say about nostalgia? — **It is not an argument**

61. Which three advantages of multiplexes are listed? — **Cleaner seats, better sound, more films**

62. Per defenders, what has the market delivered? — **What people wanted**

63. The author says the defenders' reply is correct about what? — **Comfort**

64. Who sat in the same room in the single screen? — **People of very different incomes**

65. What cost a few rupees in the single screen? — **The front stalls**

66. Single-screen pricing kept the classes in different seats but under what? — **One roof**

67. Where are multiplexes located, per the passage? — **In malls**

68. Multiplexes sort audiences into different what? — **Buildings**

69. On what devices are films now cheaper to watch, per the objection? — **Phones and streaming services**

70. The author says access to films was never what? — **The point**

71. A film watched alone on a phone is the same film but not the same what? — **Event**

72. What disappears with the single screen, per the author? — **A shared public experience**

73. Shared experiences help a divided city learn to do what? — **React as one audience**

74. Does the author want every crumbling hall preserved as a monument? — **No**

75. Each closure, per the author, was justified by what? — **Consumer choice**

76. What does a city end up making, per the cinema passage? — **A collective decision no one chose**

77. Which planning rule does the author propose for new complexes? — **Keep a share of low-priced seats**

78. Into what could old halls be converted, per the passage? — **Community screens**

79. What can no amount of better sound replace? — **The real loss**

80. What does 'crumbling' mean? — **Falling apart through decay**

81. In the sugar-tax passage, critics say the tax falls hardest on whom? — **Poorer households**

82. To what might drinkers switch, according to critics? — **Sweets or untaxed juices**

83. What word describes a tax taking more proportionally from the poor? — **Regressive**

84. Which country's levy does the sugar-tax passage discuss? — **The United Kingdom**

85. What is the UK levy called? — **The Soft Drinks Industry Levy**

86. When was the UK levy announced? — **2016**

87. From when was the UK levy in force? — **2018**

88. On whom was the UK levy charged? — **Manufacturers**

89. On what basis did the UK levy charge drinks? — **Sugar content**

90. What did drinks below the lower threshold pay? — **Nothing**

91. What did many manufacturers do before the levy took effect? — **Reformulated their products**

92. Much of the sugar left the bottle before shoppers paid what? — **A penny of tax**

93. Per the author, the critics assume the tax works through whom? — **The consumer**

94. Who gains most from reformulation, per the passage? — **Poorer households that drink more**

95. Why may a well-designed levy raise less than forecast? — **Because it is succeeding**

96. What is the true measure of a sugar tax, per the author? — **How much sugar disappears from supply**

97. Why does a single-rate levy fail to change recipes? — **Less sugar pays the same as more**