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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCE

In Russian (9RU0)

Paper 2: Written response to works and
translation

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Purpose of the paper

This paper is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society through the study and critical and analytical response to two literary texts or a literary text and a film.

This was a special series put in place to replace the cancelled Summer 2021 series of examinations, and therefore the number of entries was very small and consisted mainly of heritage / native speaker candidates. Nevertheless, some candidates had been well prepared, clearly having referenced the specification and sample materials, and studied their chosen texts or films in detail. There were some examples of candidates who knew how to translate accurately from English and how to write a structured essay which makes critical and analytical points about the chosen works.

Unfortunately, as in the Summer 2019 and Autumn 2020 series, there were also some examples of candidates who had clearly not been prepared, and who simply retold the story of their chosen work or were not able to offer any coherent essay. Examiners would wish to remind centres that it is not possible for a candidate to be entered for this examination without having studied two of the texts from the specification in detail. Simply having read the texts or seen the films is not enough for candidates to perform well.

Structure of the examination

The paper requires candidates to complete a translation into Russian and then write two essays. Their essays must either be on two literary texts or on one literary text and one film. The two texts or text and film offered for examination must be from the list set out on page 51 of the specification. The translation (section A) is worth 20 of the available 120 marks, and the two essays (section B for texts and section C for films) are worth the remaining 100 marks, with 50 marks for each essay. The essay marks consist of 20 marks for Critical and Analytical Response (AO4), 20 marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3) and 10 marks for Accuracy (AO3).

The time allowed for the examination is two hours and 40 minutes. An appropriate division of time would be for candidates to spend about 30 minutes on the translation and about an hour on each of the essays, including spending time planning their response carefully.

Advice to centres

There is no penalty applied for essays that are overlong, although teachers and candidates are encouraged to produce essays that fall within the suggested 250-word limit for A Level. Part of the skill at this level is to marshal material appropriately and be selective about what to include and what not to include. Quotations from texts or films are not counted as part of any word count.

Centres are advised to ensure that they choose works for examination carefully. Candidates should be well prepared for both their chosen works. This includes studying features such as characterisation, the form and the

technique of presentation, key concepts and issues, and the social and cultural context, as appropriate to the work studied. Candidates must have a critical and analytical appreciation of the works. This means they must be able to offer points of view and support them with evidence from the text or film. Knowing the plot and retelling it will not score highly, and neither will irrelevant information or points of view offered without evidence.

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list on page 52 of the specification;
- Divide your time carefully and do not spend too much time on the translation task;
- Check that you have not omitted any word from the translation task;
- Learn your grammatical endings carefully, focusing particularly on the cases required after prepositions and some common verbs;
- Ensure you know a range of essay phrases that will help you to write a critical response to the work you have studied;
- Ensure that you have a range of words and structures that are considered terminology appropriate for literary or cinematic analysis, such as 'plot', 'metaphor', 'first person narrative', 'the reader is given the impression that' or 'the audience can see that'.
- Seek to use more complex grammatical structures in your essay, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.;
- Ensure that you know your text or film well and have a good range of quotations to back up your points, and ensure you do not make points without reference to the text;
- Plan your essay carefully, thinking about what your conclusion will be and ensuring that your points lead up to it – decide what you want to say before you say it;
- Use a 'Point, Evidence, Explain, Link' approach to writing your essay, ensuring that you make a critical point and then back it up using evidence, explain your point in more depth and then link it to your overall argument;

- Write your essay in paragraphs so that the examiner can follow your points;
- Keep to the suggested word limit and select your material carefully;
- Ensure that your handwriting is legible.

The examining team would like to take this opportunity to thank those teachers of Russian who present excellent candidates, many taking careful note of the advice from last year's report.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage will always be based on one of the sub-themes from Theme 1, 2, 3 or 4 from pages 8-9 of the specification. The translation is split into 20 'assessable elements' (see the markscheme) and one mark is awarded for each correct element. For an element to be considered correct, it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and the grammatical endings must all be completely correct (including noun, verb and adjective endings). Spelling errors are tolerated, provided they are not part of the grammatical ending. Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. As they had studied the topic of the translation, they knew the relevant vocabulary and were able to deploy their knowledge of grammar. The small number of learner candidates were usually able to score around 8-12 marks out of 20, although the number of learner candidates scoring above this remains low. Some native speaker candidates lost marks due to omission of parts of elements (e.g. 'in Russia' in element 12 or 'young' in element 14). Native speakers also sometimes failed to offer correct specialist vocabulary, such as not knowing the word for 'unemployment' (element 12). Those with little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks in this task, even when they knew every word of the required vocabulary. Some candidates scored only 1 or 2 marks for this reason, although they had translated every word of the English.

Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- Many candidates struggled with the correct prepositional phrase 'на конференции'.
- 'The popularity of different professions was discussed' caused problems because candidates could not render the genitive plural of 'профессия' or were unable to produce or rephrase the passive construction.
- 'are interested in the professions' caused issues where candidates did not use the correct preposition and / or case after different forms of 'are interested in'.
- 'is also becoming more popular' often caused candidates to omit the comparative, simply translating into Russian as 'is also becoming popular'.

- 'youth unemployment in Russia' caused some problems with vocabulary, where some candidates did not know the word for 'unemployment'.
- Some candidates did not manage to translate 'above all' correctly, instead opting for other Russian phrases such as 'но' or 'однако'.

Sections B and C: Written Response to Works or Films

In section B or C candidates were required to write an essay on two of the texts or one text and one film that they have studied. They had to present a critical and analytical response to access the highest mark bands.

Critical and Analytical Response (AO4)

A critical and analytical response is defined in the specification as selecting relevant material from the works, presenting and justifying points of view, developing arguments, drawing conclusions based on understanding, and evaluating issues, themes and cultural and social contexts related to the works studied. In order to access the highest mark bands (9-12, 13-16 and 17-20) for 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4), essays must partly or wholly address this requirement for a critical and analytical response.

Accordingly, essays that simply re-presented the story from the text or film scored very low marks, usually in the 5-8 mark band unless there are some elements of critical or analytical response, where they may be placed on the 9-12 mark band. A critical and analytical response always involves the candidate using the essay to make points about the question being asked and using evidence to back up these points. Many non-taught candidates did not reach the top half of the 13-16 mark band because they had not considered how to structure their essay coherently, or planned its content before starting.

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Critical and Analytical Response' (AO4) mark grid were relevant, succinct, carefully planned and focused on giving a critical response throughout. Examples (usually in the form of targeted quotations or short descriptions of events or actions) were used consistently to back up the points being made, and the points were linked to an overall argument. Structure was fully coherent and the examiner could follow the sophisticated points being made throughout. In most cases, every paragraph took a 'point-evidence-explain-link' approach, with links being made to the wider thread of the essay and leading to the overall conclusion. There was no retelling of the story or lack of focus on the specific question being asked. There was invariably a very detailed knowledge of the text amongst those candidates scoring the highest marks for AO4.

Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary (AO3)

Essays that scored the highest marks (17-20) in the 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary' (AO3) mark grid had a range of complex structures, such as passives, conditionals, relative pronouns in cases other than the nominative, extended sentences to express abstract ideas (e.g. sentences requiring conjunctions and pronouns), synonyms for more common vocabulary, correct use of verbal aspects, correct use of verbs of motion, use of the subjunctive with verbs of commanding, etc.

The highest scoring essays also contained regular use of terminology and structures appropriate for literary and cinematic analysis, with a good command of specialist vocabulary such as 'director', 'character', 'plot', and also frequent structures allowing for appropriate critical and analytical response (such as 'the reader can see that...', 'from this it can be concluded that...' or 'this quotation shows that...'). Learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 band due to their ability to use essay phrases and specialist literary vocabulary. Weaker non-learner candidates often scored in the 13-16 mark band because the register of their essay was not appropriate, even though their language was completely accurate and they made relevant points. Addition of literary terms and more formal essay structures would have enabled these candidates to access the 17-20 mark band for 'Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary'.

'Accuracy of Language' (AO3)

For 'Accuracy of Language' (AO3), most native speaker candidates scored 10. To score the highest marks, writing does not have to be error free, but the general impression does have to be of accurate language with errors likely to be in more unusual or irregular forms. Learner candidates whose communication was clear and where the reader can always understand what is being said, even if not entirely accurate, can score in the 7-8 band. For the highest band, 9-10, learner candidates had to demonstrate that they were able to apply their knowledge of case and verb endings consistently, with errors not occurring from a lack of understanding but instead from lack of knowledge of a more complex situations or from how to apply their understanding in a particular context. The overall impression is of a candidate who has been taught their grammar and knows it well.

Popularity of Questions

Around 80% of candidates answered on one text and one film, and the remaining 20% answered on two texts.

Nearly 90% of candidates chose *Пиковая дама* as their literary text, including the majority of learner candidates entered for the examination. There are individual comments set out below only for the questions on *Пиковая дама*, as all other questions only received a very small number of response responses, and therefore generalisations are not possible.

Question 2 - Пиковая дама (Pushkin)

Question 2(a) was the most popular essay choice for this text. There were a good number of excellent answers which discussed whether the supernatural is the most important theme in Pushkin's story. The highest marks for Critical and Analytical Response went to those who displayed a close knowledge of the text and backed up their points with appropriate quotations or evidence in a clear, logical structure. The best essays focused on establishing why the supernatural and mysticism are being used by Pushkin, and what effect the ideas may have had on readers at the time. Many candidates reached the conclusion that other themes are more important, having weighed up the evidence. A few particularly impressive responses suggested that the supernatural is not a 'theme' at all, but rather a device that Pushkin is using in a very powerful way to draw in his reader and focus their attention on the themes of greed and madness. Good essays always had a strong conclusion that brought the strands of their argument

together and made a clear judgement about the question in hand. The least successful essays simply retold each of the supernatural episodes in the story, with no critical or analytical content, and often no introduction or conclusion. They usually described the events without any evaluation of why they are there. This retelling often led to marks in the lowest mark bands. Question 2(b) was less popular than 2(a). Most candidates were able to use evidence from the text to suggest why Lizaveta Ivanovna's role in the story is a particularly pitiful one, or conversely, suggest that in actual fact she ends up being the only character whose life 'ends happily'. The strongest candidates were able to make judgements about each of the characters' roles, comparing and contrasting their roles in the overall narrative, and the reader's attitude towards them, in the end coming to a conclusion. Weaker candidates nearly all simply agreed that Lizaveta Ivanovna plays the 'most pitiable role' and then presented varying levels of evidence to support this, rather than discussing why this might be or not be the case, presenting evidence, and then coming to a conclusion at the end. Candidates are encouraged to be discursive in their answer, rather than simply agreeing with the question. Simple language without any essay phrases or complex grammatical structures did not achieve top marks for Range of Grammatical Structures and Vocabulary. Candidates need to refer to the question throughout their essays, write in an analytical manner and draw their points to an argued conclusion in order to score in the highest mark bands.

Question 3 – Ревизор (Gogol)

There were very few answers to either question 3(a) or 3(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 4 – Вишнёвый сад (Chekhov)

There were very few answers to either question 3(a) or 4(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 5 – Один день Ивана Денисовича (Solzhenitsyn)

There were very few answers to either question 5(a) or 5(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 6 – Неделя как неделя (Baranskaya)

There were very few answers to either question 6(a) or 6(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 7 – Сонечка (Ulitskaya)

There were very few answers to either question 7(a) or 7(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 8 – Крылья (Shepitko)

There were very few answers to either question 8(a) or 8(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 9 – Утомлённые солнцем (Mikhalkov)

There were very few answers to either question 9(a) or 9(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 10 – Кавказский пленник (Vodrov)

There were very few answers to either question 10(a) or 10(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

Question 11 – Левиафан (Zvyagintsev)

There were very few answers to either question 11(a) or 11(b), and so it is not possible to make overall comments about candidates' performance.

