

Examiners' Report Summer 2009

GCE

GCE Urdu (8UR01/9UR01)

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Unit 1 Spoken Expression and Response

General

This is the first year in which candidates have been examined for this unit based upon the new GCE A/S level (8UR01) syllabus.

As this is a new examination format there was some concern about how easy or otherwise the Teacher/Examiners would be able to put the new examination into practice. As it turned out, the Examining Team has reported a few, fortunately very few, centres where the conduct of the examination has jeopardized the performances of the candidates.

Experience informs us that when the tests are well conducted the candidates score well, within their individual expertise, but if the tests are not properly conducted the ability of the candidates concerned to maximize their potential is compromised. In such cases, the team of Assessors have had to deal with them and to concentrate on the job of trying giving a fair mark to the candidates' performances, with the proviso that candidates can only be judged upon the recorded evidence presented.

Format

Each candidate is given one of two written stimuli based on their chosen Topic Area. They are given 15 minutes to look at it and make notes and then the exam commences.

There were two stimuli for each of the four Topic Areas: "Lifestyle, Health & Fitness", "The World Around Us", "Youth Culture & Concerns" and "Education & Employment."

There was little evidence of a significant preference for any particular Topic Area. Neither were there any notable differences between candidates' performance in particular stimuli.

Part 1 - 4 Set Questions

The Teacher/Examiner starts by asking 4 questions set by the board on the stimulus. These questions should NOT be rephrased.

The Teacher/Examiner starts by asking the four set questions. Where this has been done most of the candidates can score 4 marks. The candidates are expected to respond, in depth where appropriate, basing their answers mainly on the stimulus text, although expanded responses will score well under the Response heading on the mark grid. This section should not take more than a minute or two.

Part 2 - Expanded discussion

In the second part, the T/E has to spend about 6-8 minutes using questions they have prepared to broaden out the discussion. There are two key points here:

- a: that the T/E has prepared a range of questions on that topic area
and
- b: that candidates are able to respond at length and to the point to the T/E's questions on their chosen topic.

For the former the T/E has normally spent time with their students discussing and working on their chosen Topic Areas. They should know what they are interested in and are able to talk about, and equally importantly know their level of linguistic competence.

For the latter, of key importance is the candidate's understanding of their particular Topic Area, which they are meant to have been studying in depth for a year.

It is very gratifying to note that the great majority of T/Es have done this more than adequately, and, in some cases, very skillfully.

Problems

The problems arose in the first Part for some candidates because a few T/Es did not ask these questions at all or, in some cases, in the middle of the test. One T/E read the stimulus out to the candidate and then asked 4 questions, and then did the same with another stimulus from a different topic area. Teacher Examiners have a responsibility to prepare themselves as well as their students, that means finding out what they are required to do in the test.

The problems arose in the second part where T/Es had not prepared appropriately challenging questions for their candidates in order to allow them to demonstrate both their understanding of the Topic Area and their linguistic ability. Simplistic questions do not elicit extensive responses or require great understanding of the topic; neither do ones that do not broaden out the scope of the discussion.

In oral examinations there has been a long-term issue which merits some comment. While it is to be expected that candidates will practice talking about their chosen topics, this component of the examination is a discussion. It is not a monologue or a speech and should not be prepared or delivered as such. Candidates who did so were not able to score highly in the Response grid on the mark scheme.

Teacher Examiners have a hard job but they must prepare themselves as well as their students if they are to achieve their full potential. By reading the Specification, using the Edexcel Website to find out more information and preparing suitable questions for their candidates, they will be better able to conduct a successful Oral Examination. It is recommended for some centres to consider attending Edexcel inset training courses.

Organisation of Material in Centres

The main job of the Assessment team is to assess and mark the candidates' performance and that is a job requiring intense concentration. Some centres sent tapes that were either unlabeled or partially labeled, it is extremely time-consuming and wearisome to sort out unlabelled cassettes. When recording candidates, clearly state the candidate's name and number before starting each examination. While it is clearly unrealistic to expect only one candidate on each side of a tape, it is possible to use c60 cassettes that can comfortably fit two candidates on each side. The increasing use of CDs to record material is to be encouraged.

Conclusion

Despite the problems mentioned above, which, it must be stressed, affected only a small minority of centres, the overwhelming majority of tests were very well conducted by well prepared Teacher Examiners with well prepared students. All the members of my examining team reported how well prepared most of the centres were to undertake this new examination format. It is very pleasing to record a very successful first year of this new exam.

Unit 2 Understanding and Written Response

This is the first year in which candidates have been examined for this unit based upon the new GCE A/S level (8UR01) syllabus. This paper was marked on ePen.

In order to prepare the centres and teachers for the new GCE Syllabus, Edexcel has provided sample assessment material and training (on line and live events) and this has proved very useful.

It is recommended for some centres to consider attending Edexcel inset training courses.

Assessment Information

Section A: Listening

Candidates are required to listen to authentic recorded Urdu-language material and to retrieve and convey information given in the recorded material by responding to a range of Urdu-language questions. The questions elicit non-verbal responses and target-language answers. Candidates have individual control of the recording: they may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. Dictionaries are not permitted in the examination.

Section B: Reading

Candidates are required to read authentic Urdu-language material and to retrieve and convey information by responding to a range of mainly Urdu-language test types. The questions elicit non-verbal responses, Urdu-language answers and English answers that require a transfer of meaning from Urdu.

Section C: Writing

Candidates are required to write 200-220 words in the form of an article in Urdu, based on a short printed Urdu-language stimulus.

Assessment Principles

Candidates' performance is assessed positively: up to 26 marks are awarded according to a specific mark scheme, for information successfully retrieved and conveyed in response to target-language questions. Information not contained in the recorded material do not gain credit. Up to 8 marks are awarded, according to the published grids, for the content and quality of language for each of the two personal responses written in Spanish. Up to 8 marks are awarded, according to a specific mark scheme, for a guided English summary exercise.

Candidates' Responses

Section A: Listening

In general, the candidates' answers reflected a positive response to the Listening section. It was pleasing to see such a good performance. Centres had clearly prepared candidates well and most scripts reflected an appropriate level of competence and knowledge. There were some examples of poor responses on questions 3 and 4 as a result of the candidate's poor understanding of Urdu -language and grammar. These are the areas where teachers need to give practice and training to their students.

Section B: Reading

The majority of the candidates had no problem in matching the statement with the correct name and scored full marks. Question 6 was a passage about the use of gas instead of petrol in Pakistan and candidates were required to read the passage in Urdu and then answer the questions in English. Quite a large number of candidates conveyed the relevant information (in some cases the quality of English was very poor) and scored high marks.

It goes without saying that although the candidates are not being tested for their English language but they must have enough vocabulary and good spellings to tackle these type of questions. Question 7 was a narrated passage about a trip to Karachi and candidates were required to answer the target-language questions in their own words in Urdu. It was disappointing to note that a substantial number of candidates did not rephrase their answers and in some cases lifted whole paragraphs losing valuable marks. It is imperative that teachers work closely with students and prepare them for such type of questions.

Section C: Writing

Question 8 was based on a stimulus about mobile phones and the candidates were required to write an article of 200-220 word in Urdu, including the given four bullet points.

Centres and teachers were well informed about the inclusion of this writing element in the new GCE Unit 2 through the sample assessment materials and training sessions. However, a large number of scripts indicated that either the candidates were not prepared thoroughly enough or they did not understand the given task and wrote what they thought was appropriate. Some scripts with very good Urdu language and vocabulary were marked down as the content was mostly irrelevant or none of the bullet points were covered in detail. On the other hand there were some examples of excellent articles on mobile phones with each bullet point elaborated and discussed in detail. While preparing their candidates for this question the teachers must keep in mind the given assessment grid and mark allocations for content and language.

Advice and Guidance

There were some very good performances in this Listening, Reading and Writing unit. Nevertheless, several points of guidance could be made to enable centres to improve candidates' performance.

- Use of Urdu-language: Candidates should search Urdu synonyms and express answers in their own words. Transcribing information from the text (often without understanding) should be discouraged. It is also necessary to stress that correct Urdu grammar must be used in the answers.
- Urdu vocabulary and spelling: Dictionaries are not allowed in this examination, so it is essential that candidates build up their vocabulary knowledge during their preparation, ensuring that they have covered the relevant sections in the General Topic Areas. Basic spelling rules must be adhered to and should be practised.
- Knowledge of Pakistan (Target language country): The Assessment Objectives for this unit does not require candidates to include an awareness of the target-language country/countries while writing their responses. Nevertheless, the

Listening and Reading passages will all be taken from authentic sources, so it may be useful for candidates to have general knowledge of the target language country.

- Word limits: The writing section (question 8) had word limits. Credit cannot be given for material that appears beyond the stated length. Conciseness in answering questions is important. For example, it is not necessary to repeat the question when formulating an answer.
- Time management. Candidates have control over their cassettes, they may stop, rewind and replay at will. But they should be trained to use the time sensibly.
- Tidiness of presentation: This Unit was marked on-line, with the candidates' scripts scanned into ePen. There were problems with the occasional use of pencil and of scripts where the candidate had first written in pencil and had then written over in ink, leaving the answers illegible. All candidates are encouraged to present their work as tidily as possible, to write their answers in the designated spaces and, in particular, to take care that the Examiners can read the difference between the vowels a, e and o.

Statistics

Unit 1 Spoken Expression and Response

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	50	40	35	30	25	20
Uniform boundary mark	60	48	42	36	30	24

Unit 2 Understanding and Written Response

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	70	55	49	44	39	34
Uniform boundary mark	140	112	98	84	70	56

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Please note that although the modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across MFL specifications are comparable at specification level.

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