

General Comments

The first series of this new specification (1-9) was successful, with a lot of well-conducted tests from the centres. Generally a high standard of work was produced by students. Most teachers understood the specification requirements and conducted the tests very well. Most students performed very well keeping up with the demands of the new specifications, especially with the number of tasks and length of exam. Most of the centres have well prepared their pupils; they have covered a wide range of topics for all parts of the test. Most pupils have given opinions fluently without hesitation with fully developed justification to Communication Content, Linguistic Knowledge & Accuracy.

Teachers have targeted good range of relevant questions and in response to that most of the pupils have consistency in grammatical structures, successful references to tenses (past, present and future), no hindering in their clarity and they responded back so wisely. Almost all centres have attached their attendance registers. Good administration was in practice by most centres except few those have not included CS2 forms or attendance registers. Overall, mostly centres have submitted their pupil's work before deadline and work was well presented.

It is vital that centres are given robust feedback about the conducting the exams and student performances. This will enable some centres to provide training for some staff, so that in future exams are conducted smoothly and will not hinder in the performance of students. The general performances in the higher tier were good however the standard of students' work varied enormously in foundation tier. In some cases the student performance was affected because teacher was not able to meet the criteria of the exam especially in the roleplays.

The Recordings standard was generally good and examiners were able to understand the conversations clearly however occasionally they were some back ground noises for example school bell etc., which is difficult to avoid. Some teachers should be provided with the advice on positioning of the recording equipment because teachers were a lot louder than the students. The recording device needs to be closer to student rather than teacher to hear the student clearly. It is the responsibility of the person conducting the exam to ensure that full exam is conducted because in very few cases full recordings were not sent.

Role-plays

The role-plays at higher tier were clearly more challenging than those at Foundation. The majority of students did well in this part of the test, although there were some who would have been better suited to the Foundation tier examination.

Each of the role-plays asked for more details to be given than was the case at Foundation and one of the tasks in each role-play elicited a response which made reference to a past or future event. The greatest difficulty arose when students had to make reference to a past event, as verb formations were often incorrect. The last two items on the higher tier which required students to ask questions of the teacher were challenging. The need for students to practice generating questions in class cannot be stressed enough. As the first hurdle, an inability to produce interrogative pronouns seriously undermined efforts to gain marks in this item. Some students asked a completely random question rather than one linked to the cue.

Picture-based task

The maximum three minutes available for this section of the tests were ample. The only students who went over time were those who had considerable hesitation during their replies. As at Foundation tier, sometimes the re-wording of a question by the teacher did not retain the same meaning as the one in the Teacher's Booklet, and therefore any answer given by the student had to be discounted.

In order to score in the top band, students need to answer all questions clearly and develop three ('most') answers by using several clauses. There was no extra credit given in this question, which is marked for Communication only, for complex language. While accuracy and pronunciation are important factors, in order to achieve clarity, the range of language is not. However, because of the added challenge of the questions at this tier, and because of the ability of the students, many of the answers did contain more complex language. The best students were able to give extended responses to all five questions but, as at Foundation tier, there was only a need to develop three of them well.

General conversation

Most students had been entered appropriately for this tier and were able to score well. There were some, however, who would have benefitted from being entered for Foundation tier because they failed to reach the standard required for higher tier and so scored zero in all categories.

As at Foundation tier, it was really pleasing to see how much improvement there has been in pronunciation. This was certainly true of those conversations which had a natural feel to them and where teachers followed up on the students' answers which were pre-learnt to some degree. It was clear that students were well aware of what they were being asked and could exchange information successfully.

On the other hand, there were some students who had learnt very long answers to a few questions on each of the themes covered and the effect on intonation was often more noticeable than at Foundation because of the amount that had to be reproduced. In this type of test, poor pronunciation and intonation was often one problem, but also it meant that the thread of what the student was saying was hard to follow. This also affected the mark for Communication because clarity was lost.

It was very encouraging to hear many centres embracing the character of the new examination by asking different questions of different students. However, there were teachers who kept to a set list of questions which usually meant that some of the more demanding questions could not be answered by the less able at this tier. There was also a negative effect on the mark for Intonation and fluency. For example, the teacher perhaps asked a question in theme 2 about holidays and the student gave a good answer, narrating some of the things that he/she had done. It would have been logical at that point to follow up with at least one supplementary question about something the student had mentioned. Some teachers did this well, while others went straight to a completely different topic in the same theme, maybe asking about the environment in the student's home town.

When moving from one theme to another, most teachers did as requested and referred to the change of theme on the recording. Timings were usually good. The timing of the conversation at higher tier is between five and seven minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. The students who scored in the top band for Communication developed their answers consistently and, even if there were some errors of grammar or pronunciation, the intended meaning was always clear.

For Range and accuracy of language, students had to make reference to past, present and future events. If a student did not make reference to all three time frames, the maximum mark was two for Range and accuracy of language. The vast majority of teachers gave students the opportunity to avoid this happening by asking appropriate questions, eliciting references to the past, present and future.

If all three time frames were covered, this did not mean an automatic minimum mark for Range and accuracy of language because the other strands were of equal importance: range of vocabulary and structures; accuracy of the language. The key thing for a high mark was the variety of language used by the student and how accurate that language was. The less varied and the more inaccurate the language mark, the lower the mark awarded.

Pronunciation was generally good. For Spontaneity and fluency, there often had to be a balance between the two strands. As stated above, teachers were able to help with this by following up on students' replies and getting them to engage in a more natural way.

Areas for Improvement with some examples

There are few centres in which teachers who conducted the exams did not go through how to conduct speaking exam training, which misled as well as disadvantaged pupils' performance. Given below are examples to follow in next year's exam.

ensure you are following the new specification, 1UR0, to avoid use of irrelevant/ wrong/out of syllabus role-play and picture-based cards which has a severe impact on candidate scores.

conduct the exam as expected, give introductions and instructions.

be aware of how to conduct exam and what the targeted questions will be, specially picture based questioning techniques to be in line with assessment criteria. It should not be a speech but a conversation.

avoid using English vocabulary.

allowing candidate to take initiatives.

avoid additional questions in picture based section, very long unnecessary detailed responses from candidates in role play and picture based section.

give candidates an opportunity to ask questions in role play

give introduction for each card and task in all recordings.

avoid having the teacher very close to microphone and candidates far from it, which causes difficulty in listening to their recordings.

avoid noisy backgrounds, making it hard to understand.

Suggestions and Advice

- ☒ make sure pupils are fully aware of assessment criteria when they are preparing for tasks.
- ☒ There must be a step to step guide for the whole process of conducting oral speaking exam from pre exam prep to all way up to, on how to despatch material (including what to include in the pack etc.)

Roleplay

- ☒ Keep to your script as laid out in the Teacher's Role. Not to do so will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication in that task.
- ☒ Once the student completes an incorrect answer, a mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is given subsequently
- ☒ Students are required to ask questions at the end of role play. The teacher examiner must not invite students to ask question e.g. Do you have any questions? Would you

like to ask any question? By doing so students will not receive any marks for his/her response.

Photo card

- ☐ Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any follow-up questions.
- ☐ Keep an eye on the timing. If a student's replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question in the three-minute maximum time, you may be better to interrupt an answer and ask the next one.

General conversation

- ☐ Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible. Opinions are the most obvious area to focus on, so at higher tier encourage students to express them using a range of more sophisticated structures and a wider variety of adjectives than at Foundation tier.
- ☐ Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities.
- ☐ Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe their town is not going to be successful discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- ☐ Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Don't ask all students identical questions.
- ☐ In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.