

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)

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4357 01

General Comments

On this paper the reading sections are drawn from authentic texts with very little adaptation and the writing sections aim to provide candidates with opportunities to write texts which they could genuinely be called upon to write in their learning lives.

The candidates on the whole performed very competently on this paper. The written work was of a high standard and showed evidence of better preparation and more practice prior to taking the examination.

Section A

In this part candidates were asked to read entries taken from a UK magazine giving details of cultural events taking place all over the UK. Candidates were asked to match the events to set of statements (Questions 1 to 10). It is important that candidates read the questions before starting the task, so that they are aware of the main points that they will need to find in the texts in order to carry out the matching exercise. In tasks like this, they will generally have more texts to look at than questions, and they may need to choose a given text more than once, i.e. there may be two or more questions referring to a particular text. Candidates should also follow the instructions for completely the task carefully as they will not be awarded a mark if their selection is not clearly indicated.

Section B

In Part 2 candidates were given a text to read about the Oxford English Dictionary. The text is of average length for this question paper and it has been divided into two sections. Candidates were asked to answer 10 True/False/Not Given questions and five sentence completion questions.

Questions 11 - 20

As in Part 1 candidates need to read the questions very carefully and identify the main points before going back to the text to locate the information and then to decide whether the information in the question is True or False according to the text. The Note Given option is quite difficult and candidates have to determine whether the information in the question is given in the text. The not given question will always be related to the information in the text in some way and so candidates have to analyse the text quite carefully to determine whether the information they are looking for is there or not.

Questions 21 - 25

Here again candidates need to think carefully about the information in the question before going back to the text. The information in the text is always paraphrased so that it is not enough for candidates to just try and match words from the questions, they need to consider the information given. It is essential that candidates keep their responses to the number of words given in the instructions, and they should make sure that the answer they have chosen fits into the sentence correctly and accurately. Candidates will never be expected to transform the information given in the text grammatically to make it fit into the sentences. This should help them locate the correct answer in the text.

Section C

In this part, candidates were asked to read a text about VSO and answer 15 sentence completion questions based on information in the text. As in part 2, the questions will have been paraphrased and reflect information given in the text. It is essential that candidates read the questions carefully and highlight key information which will lead to locate the relevant information in the text and to find the answers which will complete the questions. Candidates must keep their answers to the number of words indicated in the instructions to the questions. It is important to train candidates to find their answers in the text. They will never be expected to formulate their answers or to transform information given in the text.

Able candidates performed very competently on all three reading sections. Weaker candidates however tended to leave questions unanswered or provided answers that did not occur in the text.

Section D

In this task, candidates were expected to select a book which they would recommend to their teacher as a text that the whole class could study together. The nature of the book was left open so that candidates could choose any book that they felt familiar with and the responses covered a large variety of book types, all of which were accepted. Candidates had to then give a brief description of the book and then give THREE reasons why they thought their particular book should be selected.

It is essential that candidate address all aspects of the task given in the bullet points. Candidate are given some background information which they can use in their response but wherever possible they should try to use their own words and phrases. The task itself then requires candidates to provide their own information.

On the whole the task was performed well. Able candidates suggested books which were suitable for class study and gave good reasons for their selection. Weaker candidates found it harder to provide a selection of reasons or in some cases overlooked this requirement.

Candidates also provided their answers in a variety of formats. A letter format is not wholly appropriate for this task, but where the tone and register of the response was appropriate and the candidates had accomplished the task, they were not penalised for the format. It is important to remind candidates that this task often required them to write in a neutral/formal tone and they should refrain from writing chatty friendly letters.

Section E

In this section candidates were asked to write a letter to a friend who would be coming to study at their school. Candidates on the whole found this task accessible. They all had things to say about their centre and on the whole followed the order of information given in the task. The tasks are set out to provide candidates with support and they should use the information given to formulate and write their responses. Candidates should also keep to the number of words given. It is generally in this section of the paper that candidate tend to write more than is necessary. It is important for candidates to keep their responses focused and relevant to the task and not to digress and provide the examiner with irrelevant information.

Section F

As always this is the most difficult section of the paper, though on the whole candidates are getting much better at dealing with this summary task. It is important to bear in mind that the task will always indicate the kind of information they should include in their summary and the text will always have information that will be irrelevant and unnecessary. Therefore ensure that candidates have read the task carefully and highlighted the key words so that they know what information they need to extract from the text.

As in previous sessions, candidates who copied large sections from the text were penalised as were those who included irrelevant information.

As with all writing tasks, candidates should be given the skills they need to proof and check their work at the end of each section. It is essential that they reread what they have written to make sure that they have addressed the task set and to correct any minor errors they find.

4357 02

General comments

Generally candidates did well on this paper. Although each part of the paper presented challenges for the candidates.

Detailed comments

There were two general types of questions on this paper: multiple choice and note/sentence completion.

Multiple Choice

As a rule, candidates followed the instructions given in the rubric for this type of question.

Note/sentence completion

Generally these questions were well attempted, although there were some candidates who did not adhere to the three-word limit given in the rubric.

Two issues arose out of these types of questions which require candidates to provide the word or words for the answer themselves.

Spelling

This proved to be a problem for many candidates. The general rule applied during marking was that if the answer affected communication, candidates were not awarded a mark. Candidates were not penalised for misspelling a word if it sounded like the target word. For example Q3 (answer bread), a spelling such as 'breade' was accepted. However, if the word sounded like a different word or was a different word (e.g. Q27 bred), candidates were not awarded a mark.

Grammar

In a few questions e.g. Q4 and Q27, candidates were required to complete a sentence using the correct grammatical forms. Although these forms were given in the recording, many candidates made errors in their answers. These were the most demanding of all the questions on this paper.

Advice to centres

It is recommended that centres prepare candidates for the listening examination by familiarizing them with the style of the tests and with the types of questions they can expect to find on the paper.

Candidates should make good use of the time before the tape is played to predict possible answers and consider the context when providing their answers.

Candidates should be advised to follow the instructions in the rubric when answering questions and to adhere to the word limit.

Candidates should consider the grammatical fit of their answers in sentence completion questions.

Candidates should consider the spelling of words when providing their answers.

4357 03

General comments

Generally the candidates did well on this paper. The paper is designed to become increasingly difficult, and this proved to be so for less able candidates, who struggled the most with Part 3. Candidates responded well to the structure of the test and seemed engaged by the content. The topics were ones which were familiar to them and they could call on their life experience to answer the questions.

Detailed comments

Interlocutors

Several of the interlocutors carried out their functions most effectively. However, there were others who did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. All of the wording and questions are provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet some interlocutors did not keep to the questions in Part 1 and Part 3. Furthermore, a number of interlocutors did not ask the supplementary prompt in brackets on the frame cards when a candidate was less forthcoming with an answer.

In Part 1, some interlocutors extended and developed the theme here and then allocated a short time for Part 3. The aim of Part 1 is to try to put the candidate at his/her ease by asking questions on a familiar topic.

In Part 3, some interlocutors did not ask questions in groups as indicated on the frame card but selected questions somewhat haphazardly. Each group of questions is generally based around a theme and questions become gradually more challenging as they progress through the group. When interlocutors did not follow the grouping of the questions they overlooked the advantages of graduating the questions they asked, and how the abilities of stronger candidates could be exploited by giving them the opportunity to answer some more challenging questions within the groups.

In Part 3, some questions had a follow-up question to encourage candidates to talk more. Some interlocutors failed to ask the second part of the question and this prevented candidates from developing their ideas more fully and thereby displaying their ability to use more complex language. Furthermore, some interlocutors did not allow for pauses to encourage candidates to expand on their responses.

Question frames

Some interlocutors chose to use a very limited number of question frames for the entire cohort of candidates.

Equipment

Some of the recordings were of very poor quality and it was hard for assessors to hear what candidates were saying. Sometimes there was a lot of machine noise, particularly when the recording level was set too high. On occasion, the interlocutor was more audible than the candidate.

Room

The room selected for the examination was not always a quiet one, and many distracting noises, such as drilling, can be heard on the tapes. Some candidates were also distracted by people moving into, out of or within the exam room. Such situations have the potential to disadvantage the candidate.

Stopping of the recording

There were instances when the recording was stopped during testing.

Recommendations to centres

Interlocutors

It is recommended that interlocutors spend more time preparing for the speaking examination so that they have a clear understanding of how it is organized and what the questions are before the start of the test. They should also ensure they are using the latest version of the 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. Time should also be taken to examine the structure of the examination and thereby gain an insight into the function of the various parts of the test.

Interlocutors are required to adhere to the questions and wordings contained on the frame cards and in the 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. They must not deviate from the script provided.

Interlocutors should avoid using words of encouragement such as 'that's good' and 'that's very interesting' as these mislead candidates about their performance. They should not paraphrase more difficult questions without being asked to by the candidate.

For reasons of fairness, all candidates should receive the same amount of preparation time (1 minute) in Part 2.

Interlocutors should listen to what candidates are saying during the test to avoid irrelevant and repetitive questions being asked. They should also allow the candidate time to respond to questions. This allows the examination to become more of a conversation rather than a question and answer session.

Interlocutors should not alter the speed at which they speak when conducting the interview. They should talk to candidates at their normal speaking speed. When interlocutors reduce their speaking speed they can become rather stilted and this effect can rub off on the candidates.

Interlocutors should not correct or rephrase what a candidate has said. An examination is not the time to conduct error correction.

Interlocutors need to ensure that each examination has a clear start and end (as per the script). At the start of each performance, they should repeat the candidate's name and number fully and clearly.

Question frames

All frames should be used. Frames should never be shown to the candidates to read. Candidates should not be invited to choose the frames in Part 2.

Equipment

Prior to the start of recording, interlocutors should conduct thorough pre-checks to ensure that the position of the microphone favours the candidate and that the volume on the tape is checked so that the best possible recording of the candidate can be obtained. It is further recommended that the best quality recorder and microphone available be used for the speaking test.

If a candidate is speaking quietly or indistinctly, he/she should be asked to speak up.

Interlocutors should make sure that there is enough space on a tape before they start recording a candidate. This avoids situations where the test has to be interrupted in order to turn over the tape. Interlocutors should also check the recordings of the candidates before sending them off.

Stopping of the recording

Recording should never be stopped during testing. This is clearly stated in page 5 of the Instructions for the conduct of examinations (Paper 3 - Speaking). This page also contains instructions on what steps need to be carried out should the tape be stopped.

Administration

Centres are requested to include a cover sheet for each candidate with the recording. Details of the candidate and the recording should be provided. However, interlocutors must not complete the section for examiner's use only.

Room

Centres should allocate a quiet room for speaking examinations where extraneous noise is at a minimum and where there will be no interruptions during the course of the exam

Statistics for IGCSE English as a Second Language 4357

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary mark - Overall	88	78	68	59	52	45	38	31

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

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