

IGCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 4355, NOVEMBER 2005

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Paper 1F

The smaller intake for the November series makes it more difficult to generalise about the performance of candidates.

Section A

The passage adapted from *A Moment of War* by Laurie Lee proved to be accessible to all candidates. All candidates were able to offer some response to the passage and were able to select and retrieve information. More detailed engagement with the passages were characterised by the extent to which candidates could infer the lack of trust for the writer and comment on aspects of technique. Centres should note that in order to prepare candidates for the higher mark bands they should be developing in them an awareness of how writers often suggest what they mean rather than stating it explicitly.

Section B

Some candidates are clearly spending too long on Section B, to the detriment of their response in Section C. There are recommendations about timing on the paper and centres should ensure that candidates are clearly aware of these.

Better responses to *Touching the Void* were those that were able to explain their understanding with clarity. Candidates should avoid offering statements such as, "The language that has been used is formal" if this is not then used to develop how this language choice contributes to the meaning of the passage. The final bullet point in this section will usually refer directly to language and centres should ensure that candidates are equipped to respond appropriately to this aspect of these pre-released passages.

The writing response about friendship was accessible to all candidates and allowed most candidates to write from direct experience, whilst some produced what appeared to be a more fictional responses. All responses were credited, with the award of marks being clearly based upon the quality of written communication. Although this is a shorter piece of writing centres should stress the need to paragraph work as this clearly indicates the structure of a piece of writing and is a feature of mid and upper mark bands.

Section C

The writing task was accessible to all candidates. Centres would be advised to stress with candidates the need to demonstrate their writing skills. Candidates should see this as an opportunity to deliberately craft their writing with a clear outcome in mind. Some candidates would benefit from an opportunity to briefly plan their work and make choices about how the story is to be told and what techniques can be employed to ensure that the reader responds as intended. Better quality answers were well paragraphed, not necessarily chronological, and showed control of expression through a variety of means such as appropriate vocabulary and manipulation of sentence type and length.

Paper 2H

Section A

The passage adapted from *A Moment of War* by Laurie Lee was accessible to almost all candidates. All candidates were able to offer some response to the passage with the discriminator being their response to question 3. Candidates need to be taught to make full use of the mark tariff as a guide to help them determine how much time to spend and how much detail to offer. In this way candidates would ensure that they had fully exploited the opportunities available in question 3 to gain 12 marks by a detailed analytical response to the passage, but had not spent too long on questions 1 and 2 where the scope required of the answer is clearly more limited.

Section B

Some candidates are clearly spending too long on Section B, to the detriment of their response in Section C. There are recommendations about timing on the paper and centres should ensure that candidates are clearly aware of these.

Most candidates responded well to the extract from *Chinese Cinderella*. Better quality answers were those who were able to offer an understanding of the complexity of the writer's relationship with her father; that it is not simply one of fear and mistrust, but is also characterised by love and a deep-seated desire to win his approval.

The writing response was clearly a task that all candidates were able to respond to, and many produced thoughtful and careful responses. Candidates need to be reminded with such activities that the examiner is not making a value judgement on what the writer would choose to do with the money, but is looking at the quality of written communication. Better answers therefore were those which moved beyond a simple list of what the money would be spent on.

Section C

The stimulus of hobbies and pastimes was one that produced many good responses. Some chose to emphasise the need to write directly for a school-based audience, others simply wrote about their hobbies. All responses were credited. The better quality answers were characterised by an ability to shape their writing through a variety of means, such as control and variety of sentences, structure and paragraphing, in order to communicate in a highly effective manner with the reader. Lower quality answers were those that seemed to have little idea that the writer needs to establish a relationship with the reader and make appropriate choices about the style of written communication. Centres should ensure that candidates briefly plan their work, not necessarily in a written format, in order to ensure that they have given themselves time to move on from considering what they will write, to how they write it.

Paper 03

Part 1 Reading (London Examinations Anthology Part B)

Question 1

The question on Moniza Alvi's poem was straightforward and most candidates coped more than adequately with it. Some found the text challenging and there were a few odd interpretations, including those who thought that the poet was the 'Leader' of the country. Occasionally, too, there was a sense that the candidate was reading the poem for the first time in the examination room. This was disappointing given that the text is part of a pre-released Anthology, and there is a detailed section in the Student's Guide about the poem. The text is provided simply as a prompt to memory. Candidates, who wish to access higher bands of the marking grid, should note that is important to write about the language features of texts in this section. (One bullet point will always refer to the use of language.)

Part 2 Writing

Question 2

The writing questions were answered competently. Though 2 (c) proved the most popular, each option attracted a number of candidates. It was clear that some candidates had prepared essays which they adapted to the question. This is a high risk strategy and in some instances the disparity between the question and the response was so great that the answer scored poorly on the first two strands of the marking grid.

2(a)

In general candidates showed a sound command of letter format and of a style that was appropriate for the context. Advice was given clearly in most cases.

2(b)

Few candidates attempted this question. Of these, some spent too much time on the account and too little on the second half of the question, which required the candidate to explore his or her thoughts and feelings about the experience.

2(c)

This was the most popular question and there were some lively answers and some engaging accounts. More successful answers also showed an awareness of the magazine context and its readers. The weakest answers were those which adapted a pre-written story to fit this context.

Component 04 - Written coursework

Relatively few centres submitted coursework. Standards were very much in line with the summer examinations. The specification requirements had been followed carefully in almost all cases. A varied selection of tasks was presented for both Unit 1 (Reading) and Unit 2 (Writing.)

There were no administrative problems; the centres are to be commended for following the procedures efficiently.

Assessment still tends to be very generous. Centres need to use the grids carefully when allotting marks, particularly at the top end of the ability range. In general, high marks tended to be given too readily for pedestrian pieces that demonstrate little more than competence.

In terms of the **Reading Unit**, A* work should provide some evidence of exceptional skill, even originality, perhaps through the evaluation of alternative interpretations, whilst A grade work should show “analytical and interpretative skill” in detailed consideration of the language features of a text and, where two texts are considered, in making “apt and careful” comparisons between them. For the **Writing Unit**, pieces that aspire to high marks should engage and sustain the reader’s interest through (at the least) an effective command of expression; the higher the mark, the more ambitious the choice of vocabulary, and of text and grammatical structures should be. The key words for highest attainment are “assured”, “compelling” and “sophisticated.”