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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback

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Section A

Most candidates were confident in delivering their presentation and had clearly prepared for this element of the speaking test. In such instances, candidates regarded this success as a confidence boost, meaning that the discussion component would largely reflect this successful first minute of the test. In some instances, candidates hesitated to a certain degree, even during the presentation. This is often part of a cycle of natural hesitation and as such, there is no need for this to impact in any negative way on the mark allocated for Presentation/Communication/Fluency. Natural hesitation indicates spontaneity, suggesting that the candidate is taking a moment to reflect, before proceeding with the rest of the presentation. This remains particularly important during the discussion which follows.

It is natural for the discussion to be less developed than the presentation, as candidates have rather less opportunity to prepare for this. Candidates do however choose the overall topic for the presentation and discussion, thus allowing them to optimise the opportunity to develop the themes introduced during that initial minute of presentation. Most candidates were seen to take full advantage of this opportunity. Teachers/examiners were most skilful in effecting a smooth transition from presentation to discussion, as has been the case in all recent series. A significant minority of candidates were more at ease during the discussion than the presentation, as they felt confident in embarking upon a meaningful and free flowing dialogue, having chosen a subject of particular interest to them. Even where the teacher/examiner elected to ask totally unexpected questions, such candidates rose to the challenge exceptionally well. This indicated an excellent interviewing technique. Such outstanding practice was in evidence across most centres and confirms the importance of teachers/examiners meeting candidates well in advance of the speaking test.

In a small number of cases, the candidate seemed to be addressing the teacher/examiner for the first time. In such cases, the teacher/examiner made every effort to elicit the best performance from candidates, even though this situation tended to lead to emphasis being placed upon the sample questions provided to centres. Meeting candidates on a number of occasions in advance of the speaking test does allow teachers/examiners to exploit candidates' strengths. In almost all cases, the teachers/examiner did indeed have a prior awareness of each candidate's linguistic level. This allowed the discussion to be targeted at the correct level of demand.

The selection of an appropriate picture can have a very positive impact upon the success of individual candidates in Section A and this opportunity leads to a very diverse choice of image. Most images were a reflection of the requirements of this specification and portrayed the three prescribed elements: people, objects and interaction. In virtually, all cases where the candidate selected a picture based on personal experience, both the initial presentation and even the ensuing discussion included a clear sense of purpose. In a small number of instances, the candidate seemed to be unfamiliar with the actual picture and may have chosen it at a very late stage. In most cases, such images work less well during the discussion, as the candidate is much less familiar with the broader context. The discussions they engendered often surpassed the linguistic reach of the candidate.

Equally, such images do not always lend themselves to the three stages of questions required within the discussion element.

Suitable pictures in colour were easily exploited during the discussion, as it tended to be easier for the teacher/examiner to target specific details. Equally, pictures where different things were happening within the same scene were beneficial, in most instances. Where candidates were able to identify with people and events portrayed in the picture, responses tended to be much more authentic and spontaneous, as they were a reflection of the candidates' own experiences. Images containing multiple activities did occasionally impact negatively on performance, as the candidate may have been unfamiliar with the people and events portrayed. In these rare instances, there was too much happening in the picture.

Reflecting previous series, some candidate's favoured cartoon based pictures. This often facilitated a certain degree of originality, in respect of both presentation and discussion. This type of image therefore tended to work very effectively for more confident candidates. Scenes depicting family members and friends did however remain the most popular style of picture. Such images do tend to allow less confident candidates to settle into the discussion, after having presented key information relating to family members/friends and related events. The candidate's frame of mind was typically aided by such images, as they typically portrayed enjoyable events, such as family celebrations. Questions arising from these images often related to themes that less confident candidates were able to discuss, with some development. This allowed such candidates to exercise some control over the direction of the discussion. Equally, these family images usually worked well across the entire range of candidate performances.

During the discussion, it is a requirement that all three stages of questioning be included. This involves questions relating directly to the picture, questions which go further and questions on the wider topic area.

In the vast majority of cases, questioning techniques used in the discussion were appropriate to the task. There were however a few teachers/examiners who had not fully registered what the candidate had offered during the presentation, as they then elicited the same information during the ensuing discussion. Most teachers/examiners were mindful to minimise the use of closed questions. Virtually all knew their candidates well and avoided asking questions that their candidates would be unable to navigate.

Instances of candidates being interrupted were very rare. This tends to limit candidate performance, such as in cases where they are not allowed sufficient opportunity to expand responses via the use of a subordinate clause.

In those instances where a question was misinterpreted by a candidate, it was however excellent practice to divert the candidate towards the desired theme. This was managed in a sensitive manner, without unsettling the candidate and was indicative of outstanding interviewing technique.

Section B

In cases where teacher/examiners are unfamiliar with the specification, they may wish to access the Sample Assessment Materials (SAMS). These include types of questions teachers/examiners may wish to ask candidates, although these examples are intended only as a guide. It is preferable not to adhere too rigidly to SAMS materials, as this tends to restrict individual candidate performance. These questions may however be a useful guide for teachers/examiners who do not know the candidates.

The vast majority of recordings offered a suitable variety of question types, allowing candidates to incorporate a diverse range of structures and vocabulary. Teacher/examiners were successful in eliciting optimal performances, thanks to their questions being consistently targeted at an appropriate level.

There is an expectation that more confident candidates respond to a wide range of questions across conversations B1 and B2. Most teachers/examiners only tended to escalate the level of linguistic demand where candidates were able to meet this challenge. Both skill and sensitivity were in evidence where teacher/examiners needed to rephrase and repeat questions.

Conduct of Examination

Most teacher/examiners adhered to the requirements on timings, allowing candidates to access the whole time window available for individual elements.

In section A, there were some instances where presentations lasted for between fifteen and thirty seconds, as opposed to the maximum one minute. Discussions were occasionally limited to less than two minutes, as opposed to the maximum of three minutes. For both the presentation and discussion, there were a few instances where the maximum time limit was exceeded by well over one minute.

In Section B, each conversation should last about three minutes. In several instances, conversation 1 was very brief, meaning that candidates were not able to access the full range of marks. In cases where conversation 1 is too short, this cannot be compensated by extending the second conversation beyond the three minute maximum.

Utterances which take place beyond the prescribed time limits **during any element of the speaking test** cannot be rewarded, as each element is timed independently.

In the vast majority of cases, teachers/examiners were mindful to indicate the transition between the two conversations. Teachers/examiners nearly always displayed interest in candidate responses, meaning that candidates were keen to share their experiences and therefore developed their responses.

In virtually all instances, centres adhered to the procedures concerning topic coverage. There were a few cases where more than one conversation/discussion (in either section A or B) related to the same topic area. **Each topic area can only be covered once in any of the three parts of conversation – intentionally or unintentionally.**

Administrative Matters

The vast majority of centres offered an excellent standard of administration. This consistency was greatly appreciated and facilitated the assessment process.

CDs/USBs were correctly labelled in most cases. Documentation was typically presented with excellent attention to detail. In a few cases, centre documentation was incomplete. Pictures/Photographs relating to Section A were missing from a few parcels. These should be attached to each candidate cover form. Sub-topic areas should be noted on the candidate cover form. The current specification offers the appropriate guidelines on pages 44-45. This section may be particularly helpful for centres conducting the speaking test for the first time.

Centres are kindly asked to verify recording quality and to check that CDs/USBs are not faulty. Nearly all teacher/examiners were mindful to ensure that recordings were clearly audible. Checking the first part of each recording is recommended. Some recordings were not clearly inaudible, due to obtrusive background noise. The teacher/examiners could usually be heard very clearly, but candidate utterances were occasionally very faint. The microphone should always be placed in such a position that **it favours the candidate rather than the teacher/examiner.**

Grade Boundaries

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