Examiners' Report
IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)

June 2006

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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE 4357, CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Paper 1

Reading – General Comments

Candidates generally performed well in the reading paper and seemed to encounter few problems in terms of the subject matter of the reading texts. All texts seemed to be accessible. However, some candidates lost marks because they did not read the instructions carefully. Where answers were mis-spelt but the response was clearly recognisable, these answers were accepted as correct.

Part 1
There were few problems encountered by candidates here. It is important to remember that the sentences in the task will not necessarily use the same language as is present in the text and candidates need to do some processing in order to match the information in the task with that of the text.

Part 2
Questions 11 to 20 seemed to present few problems to candidates. They generally dealt well with the True/False answers though some had problems spelling the words correctly. However, all misspellings were accepted as long as the candidate's answer was clear. The Not Given questions presented some problems for weaker candidates. This is a harder task for them to do and extra practice would be helpful in analysing the text and ensuring that they are not confusing the Not Given element with what they expect to read or with information which is actually presented as False in the text.

In questions 21 to 25, most candidates found the answers successfully. However, it is important to read the instructions given to all of the tasks as this is also part of the examination process. Those candidates who wrote full sentences or used more than three words were not given the mark. It is important for candidates to realise that they are not expected to formulate a sentence for these types of questions or to manipulate the information they are given in the text in any way. They will never be expected to perform any kind of grammatical transformation in these types of questions and should simply put down the answer using the minimum number of words identified in the instructions.

Part 3
This was the most challenging section of the Reading section. However, even the weakest candidates were able to answer some of the questions.

In questions 26 to 36, candidates did not seem familiar with this kind of note-taking task type. They should always take note of the instructions regarding number of words needed to fill each gap, and they will never be expected to reformulate or change any

of the words necessary to complete the task once they find them in the text. However, the note-taking task does paraphrase the information available in the text so candidates will need to process information both from the text and in the task to be able to find the correct answers. In this kind of note-taking task where they are presented with sentences, it is important for candidates to remember that the answers they provide must fit in grammatically with the sentence they are completing, so it is important to take note of any clues which allow them to decide whether they need a plural answer and so on.

Questions 37 to 40 were dealt with quite competently by candidates and presented few problems.

Writing – General Comments

Candidates of all abilities were able to attempt all three writing tasks. Some candidates showed creativity in their responses though these did at times tend to be inappropriate in terms of tone and register. Parts 4 and 5 ask for some creativity in the response and candidates will always be expected to provide information themselves to be able to complete these tasks. However they must make sure that this creativity does not hinder communication or cause confusion to the reader.

Part 4

All candidates seemed to understand this task and be able to attempt a response. However, many wrote a letter to their head teacher rather than presenting their response in the form of a short report. These responses were accepted as long as the tone and register was correct. Those who did attempt to write a report used a variety of layouts. Again all formats were accepted as long as they did not cause the reader any confusion. Tone and register is an important element of the tasks in this part of the test and will always provide a contrast from tasks in Part 5. It is important that candidates show they can work in a variety of different registers and produce texts which are clear and communicate the required information to the reader, and do not cause any confusion.

The students were expected to deal with all requirements of the task. There were three bullet points from which they were to select the best choice and then explain what the advantages and disadvantages were for students AND for the school. Most candidates made their choice clear though this was done in a variety of ways. Where a choice was not clear they were penalised under the Communicative Quality Criterion. Many students clearly stated advantages of their choice to the students in the school but at times the advantages to the school were forgotten. This was not penalised at this first administration of the test. But this element of the task clearly identified the stronger candidates. It is also important for students to remember that they should not copy the scenario given in the task to add to the number of words they are writing.

Finally it is important for candidates to keep to the word limits given. Candidates are given a broad range and should be able to meet the minimum number of words required. Shorter texts do not provide examiners with enough evidence for them to be able to make a fair judgement on candidates' abilities.

Part 5

This task was informal and was designed to be accessible to all students and many dealt with it very competently as the scenario was familiar to them all.

Candidates were asked to write an email to a friend, but those who wrote a letter were not penalised for this. However it is important that they should read all the instructions carefully and follow them as closely as possible. The task required candidates to invite a friend to stay with them for the weekend during the holidays. Examiners expected to see a clear invitation, identification of a particular weekend, possibly with dates, though 'next weekend' was accepted as clear enough. Candidates were also expected to provide at least two activities that they could do during the weekend. Many provided reasons for the invitation, which was a nice addition, and these were accepted as long as they did not cause readers any confusion.

Although the tone and register were meant to be familiar and informal, some levels of informality were not suitable, and these responses were penalised under Communicative Quality, as were responses where the invitation and the particular weekend were not clearly identified. It is important for students to take the time to read their responses and to make sure that they are communicating the required information clearly. It is also important to keep to the word count without digressing from the topic or writing information which is irrelevant to the task. Where these caused confusion, they were penalised under Communicative Quality.

Part 6

This Part of the Writing section was by far the most difficult for candidates to tackle. Candidates seemed to understand the text easily enough and most were able to select the relevant information to include in their summary. Some, however, did confuse habitat with habits. In this part of the examination it is important for candidates to identify clearly the information that they need to include in the summary and this will generally be presented to them in the form of bullet points. One part of the task is to be able to find the information to include in the summary and to be able to identify what information in the text is irrelevant to the task. Candidates who included irrelevant information from the task or who included information from their own general knowledge were penalised under Communicative Quality.

Plagiarism was another issue in this task. Candidates are expected to use some of the language in the text but examiners want to see how this language has been manipulated to produce a short summary. Candidates who copied large chunks of text or long phrases were therefore penalised.

Tone and register were also at times an issue in this task. Candidates must realise that the task will identify a reader where appropriate. In this instance they were writing a short summary for their teacher. Some candidates chose to write in either a very informative style or to produce texts which were inappropriate to the given context.

In preparing candidates for this task it is important that teachers make sure they read the instructions carefully and identify both what information they need to include and what the purpose/who the readership of the summary is. They should then produce a

short text with the information provided in such a way that allows the examiner to use all four criteria to make a judgement on the written text the candidates have produced. Since in this task candidates are not expected to provide any information themselves or to show any creativity, issues such as accuracy of grammar and vocabulary as well as coherence are very important.

Paper 2

General comments

Generally candidates did well or very well on this paper, many scoring over 20 marks. However, there was also a wide spread of marks throughout the range. Of the three parts of the paper, Part 2 was found to be the most challenging for candidates. Most candidates coped well with Parts 1 and 3.

Detailed comments

There were three general types of questions this paper: multiple choice, table/sentence completion and short answers.

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

Table/sentence completion and short answers
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, as follows:

• 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 Question 3 (answer 'poetry'), spellings such as 'poetery' and 'poetory' were accepted. However, if the word sounded like a different word (e.g. Q3 'potery'), candidates were not awarded a mark.

• Grammar

In a few questions e.g. Q15 and Q20, 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 familiarising 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 on how to answer 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.

Paper 3

General comments

Generally 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 experiences to answer the questions.

Detailed comments

Interlocutors
Several of the interlocutors did not follow the instructions contained in 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'. All of the wording and questions were provided either in the instructions or on the frame cards, yet there were interlocutors who asked their own questions based on those on the frame cards or they improvised. On occasion, interlocutors asked questions which were not clear and some candidates were confused about how to reply.

In Part 2, in instances where the candidate had not addressed the question on the task card, some interlocutors did not repeat the question to ensure that the candidate fulfilled the requirements of the task (see Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations – Page 7).

In Part 3, many interlocutors did not ask questions in groups as indicated on the frame card but jumped about.

Each group of questions in Part 3 is generally based around a theme and questions become gradually more challenging as they progress through the group. Many

interlocutors jumped about between groups of questions without considering the advantages of graduating the questions they asked, and how the abilities of stronger students could be exploited by giving them the opportunity to answer some of the more challenging questions within the groups.

In Part 3, several questions had a follow-up question to encourage candidates to talk more. Many 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.

Equipment
Some of the recordings were of very poor quality and it was hard for assessors to hear what candidates were saying. 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 can be heard on the tapes. Some candidates were also distracted by people moving in/out or around the exam room. Such situations have the potential to disadvantage the candidate.

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. 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 requested to adhere to the questions and wordings contained on the frame cards and in the 'Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations'.

Interlocutors should avoid using words of encouragement such as 'that's good' and 'that's nice' as these mislead candidates about their performance.

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

Interlocutors should ensure that the question in Part 2 is addressed by the candidate and they should repeat the question if need be. Furthermore, interlocutors should take care to ensure that during the course of the examination, candidates are not asked repetitive or irrelevant questions.

Equipment
Prior to the start of recording, interlocutors should 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.

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 examination. Furthermore, if a chaperone is required, this person must be seated in the room before the exam commences.

4357 ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE, GRADE BOUNDARIES

	Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Lowest mark for award of grade	Overall award of subject	87	77	67	58	51	44	37	30
	Optional, separate speaking test	19	17	14	12	10	8	6	4

Note: Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.