Examiners' Report November 2007

IGCSE

IGCSE English as a Second Language (4357)

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Contents

Examiner Report
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IGCSE English as a Second Language: Paper 01

General Comments

Generally the candidates performed well in all 6 sections of the paper and it is obvious that both candidates and teachers are becoming more familiar with the requirements of the paper and are better prepared.

However, there are still certain issues that all candidates and teachers should keep in mind.

- It is essential that candidates read all the instructions carefully and do exactly what the tasks ask them to do.
- Proof reading is an important skill and candidates should check all their answers both for the reading and the writing sections of this paper.
- It is important that candidates keep to the number of words specified in all sections of this paper.
- Candidates do not need to formulate answers for the reading sections of this paper (Sections 1 to 3). The answers are in the texts and the candidates need to think carefully about the task and find the correct section with the answer in the text and copy the relevant words. Answers in the reading sections need to be spelt correctly and be grammatically accurate.
- In Multiple Choice and True/False Questions, candidates need to indicate one answer only per question. Where more than one answer is required, this will be clearly indicated in the instructions to the task.

Section 1
In this section of the paper, candidates were required to find specific information in each part of the text. It is important to remember that in tasks such as this, all parts of the text will not necessarily be targeted and there may sections that do not need to be used as an answer to a question. It is important that candidates read each section carefully and select only one answer per question, unless stated otherwise.

Section 2
Candidates appeared to find this section more challenging because they had to write answers down rather than selecting an answer. Here it is important for candidates to read the instructions carefully and keep their answers to the number of words specified.

Candidates failed to gain marks because of spelling errors and for not keeping to the word limit. Also some candidates formulated answers which were not in the text. It is important that answers come from the text rather than from the candidate's general knowledge.

The content of the reading texts did not seem to cause candidates any particular difficulty. This text was based on original material taken from the website of this water board and there were very few amendments made to it. It is important when preparing candidates for this examination, that teachers expose them to authentic reading material which can come from a wide variety of sources.

Section 3
Candidates generally performed well on this section of the paper, however not all candidates marked their answers as directed in the instructions, some bracketing their choice of answer rather than putting a cross in the box. It is important that candidates are familiar with this task type and are aware of what they need to do to indicate their responses.

Section 4

In this section, candidates generally performed very well. Answers were presented in a variety of formats and layouts. Those who divided their answer into sections generally gave a clearer response to the task. Some candidates presented their report in the form of a letter and were the language was appropriate to a report, this was not penalised.

It is important here that candidates present their response in a well organised manner, addressing all the requirements of the task. Some candidates spent a large amount of time for example, explaining why they had not chosen a certain activity type and then were left with very little space to actually respond to the task. The most successful responses were those that addressed all requirements of the task equally giving importance to each element/bullet.

Section 5

The vast majority of candidates seemed confident in using the letter format with a clear introduction explaining why they were writing and with a set of appropriate closing expressions.

Candidates were very creative in responding to this task and where their explanations were reasonable and appropriate, they were not penalised in any way. However, it is important to keep within the bounds of the task set. Some candidates found the need for a more formal tone and register slightly more difficult to deal with and the weaker candidates were unable to maintain an appropriate tone throughout the letter. Many candidates seemed to insist on overusing sequencers and cohesive devices which makes reading the text quite difficult. It is important that candidates are taught where and how to use these devices appropriately and they should also be made aware of the negative impact that the overuse of such words can have on the reader.

Section 6

This is proving to be the most demanding section of the paper. Candidate need to be aware that part of the requirement of the task is the need for them to identify relevant information in the text rather than just summarising the whole text. There is still evidence of excessive lifting of text for the summary and some candidates also included information that was not present in the text. Candidates need to be given more practice in completing summary tasks where they need to analyse the text carefully and select the relevant information before beginning to write their summaries.

It is essential that candidates use their own words and phrases where possible in completing this task. Excessive lifting is penalised as are overlong responses.

Final notes

It may be helpful for candidates when preparing for sections 4 to 6, that they plan their responses before beginning writing. This is especially true for section 6 and may help the weaker candidates produce clearer written texts.

Being familiar with a variety of text types and sources will also help candidates greatly and exposure to a wide range of reading texts should help with both the reading and the writing sections of this paper.

Finally candidates need to take the time to consider the instructions they are given and think carefully about what they are being asked to do.

Examiner Report
November 2007
IGCSE English as a Second Language: Paper 02

General comments
Generally candidates did well on this paper. 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 Q27 (answer loud noises), a spelling such as 'loude noises' was accepted. However, if the word sounded like a different word or was a different word (eg Question 27 load noises), candidates were not awarded a mark.

Grammar
In a few questions eg Question 28 and Question 29, 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.

Examiner Report
November 2007
IGCSE English as a Second Language: Paper 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 were 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.

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, including drilling and dogs barking, 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. 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 should 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.

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.

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 very quietly 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.

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.

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.

Statistics for IGCSE English as a Second Language 4357

Grade	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Boundary mark – Overall	89	79	69	59	52	45	39	33

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

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