

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

International GCSE
English Language (4EA0)
Paper 2

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General Overview

Overall, this was considered to be an examination which was fair and attainable for many candidates; it compared favourably with the June 2011 paper.

The Frost poem proved accessible to a wide range of candidates with a wide range of ability.

The writing responses were on the whole sound. Many candidates were able to write complete responses that showed evidence of good planning and structure. Candidates were able to construct competent and clear answers that seemed to be well managed in terms of time. There were also a good number of very effective and engaging responses. The three choices for the writing question appeared to provide plenty of scope for candidates to construct and develop sound and sustained responses. The three questions were successful and a clear effort had been made to provide candidates with topics which were accessible and in keeping with a teenager's experiences.

Centres should remind their candidates to plan for crafting as well as actual content, and avoid becoming too indulgent in their writing. Many examiners remarked upon the level of skill demonstrated by many students for whom English was clearly a second language. Centres should be commended for their teaching and preparation of these students.

Reading

Question 1

Most candidates understood the poem and many centres had prepared their candidates well, although there were a number of answers which confused events and characters. The strongest answers were sharply focused on the boy's accident and its aftermath. There was sometimes too much focus on use of terminology such as oxymoron, personification and metonymy, without any real analysis of the effects or relevance to the question, although many candidates dealt well with these techniques and almost all candidates had a good knowledge of poetic devices and were able to incorporate examples from the poem into their responses. Less able candidates were able to comment simply on the use of personification and oxymoron, whilst more able candidates explored the use of contrast; the symbolism of the extended allusions to light and dark; the impact of authorial intrusion and finally the intertextual reference to *Macbeth*.

There was some tendency towards lengthy discussion of relevant material, such as the Great War, industrialisation, child labour and so on, some of which were tangential and drifted some way from the question. Better answers in this regard provided a balance between evaluation of the poem itself and insightful

references to broader social, cultural and historical issues; a number of candidates also demonstrated a good knowledge of the poet and the context of the poem itself. Some very astute answers focused on the ambiguity of the accident, the use of authorial voice and the detached tone. There was some evidence of 'learned' responses – regurgitating taught information without reference to the question set; conversely there were also plenty of informed personal responses.

Many candidates also remained focused on the question although at times their responses were undeveloped and read more like statements rather than an analysis of technique. Answers in the vast majority of cases appeared to be well managed and complete, indicating good time management from the candidates.

Overall, this poem was extremely well-taught by centres with candidates frequently showing a sound and often assured response, using quotations well in support of their ideas. The poem selected was a very good choice; it combined a simplistic narrative with sophisticated literary techniques. In doing so, the text was consequently accessible for less able candidates whilst simultaneously able to stretch those at the very top end. The poem was also a good choice in terms of linguistic content as a range of techniques were at work, some more challenging to analyse than others.

The bullet points offered a helpful guide to structuring the question and, from the responses, it was evident that many candidates had used this structure successfully to inform their answer. As many students undertaking the paper will have English as a second language, the theme of 'sadness' was highly appropriate as this term provided a good focal point for responses. The simplicity of this word choice was also helpful in terms of recognition for less assured readers of English.

For future development, centres should remind candidates to comment on the effect of devices rather than simply 'feature spot', so some work needs to be done on ensuring that candidates know the terminology required for responding to literary texts, but also how to apply the terminology in a meaningful way. Less able candidates may also benefit from linking each paragraph directly back to the question in order to keep a close focus on theme and authorial intention. In summary, this was a well-written question, with a thoughtful choice of poem. This task allowed all candidates to demonstrate their potential.

Writing

Question 2a

This was by far the most popular question in this section and was generally well answered. The best answers evidenced clear organisation, with points fully

developed. Weaker responses needed to be more focused on a narrower range of possible causes of pressure. Interestingly, some of the strongest answers argued against the proposition, perhaps because this forced them to look at things from a different perspective. The best responses were those which demonstrated a clear sense of craft, making full use of a range of rhetorical devices in keeping with the 'argue' purpose dictated by the task.

In some cases, students lost out on marks for structure as they tended to become absorbed by the topic of exam pressure, and failed to construct a varied, developed or compelling argument as a result. That said, a number of students produced highly intelligent responses commenting on the globally competitive market, current financial strains and the pressures generated by recent technological advancement. Anecdotal evidence was also used well in this task.

For future development, centres should be reminded to stress the need for a range of rhetorical devices in order for responses to be classed as 'effective' and above. Equally candidates should be reminded to use varied and sophisticated connectives to add to cohesion as well as being able to divide the main argument into a series of clear and developed sub-points. Although candidates were not penalised for arguing both sides of the viewpoint, candidates that adopted a firm stance tended to do better as their arguments were more impassioned and developed. Overall, the responses to this question were quite insightful.

Question 2b

Weaker answers tended to be rather random, moving from sexually transmitted diseases to the importance of looking both ways when crossing the road. The best answers had a lively tone, clear organisation and a focus on a few elements of staying safe. Whilst this was the least favoured task, candidates who did opt for this choice seemed to do well. This could be attributed to the clearly directed purpose and audience. Candidates generally succeeded in tailoring their tone to their teenage audience, in some cases using youth speak and humour extremely well. A few candidates did mistake the audience for parents of teenagers, but this was not commonplace.

This task seemed to invite a greater variation in sentence structure, seeing many candidates use short sentences particularly well for emphasis. Imperatives and an authoritative, yet understanding, tone seemed to come quite naturally to candidates, perhaps because they have received talks of a similar nature themselves. Structuring responses is probably the greatest area for development in this question. More effective responses clearly signalled the direction of the talk and tended to choose three interlinking areas upon which to comment.

Question 2c

This question elicited a very wide variety of responses, as would be expected from the title. The best answers were well thought through and organised, with a clear awareness that the candidates were required to write a magazine article. Weaker answers tended to float through a variety of wishes with no clear organisation, most of which were to do with world peace. Some very strong answers discussed the 'point' of wishing and made some very interesting observations. Responses to this question were mixed.

Some students became quite personally involved in the topic to the detriment of their crafting skills. Candidates did not always manage to inform, entertain and influence likely readers; rather their responses often took the form of personal goals listed through dreamy prose, with no specific audience in mind. The stronger responses included powerful anecdotes and morals which made the pieces more engaging and suitable for a magazine article as a consequence. On the whole, this task did prompt emotive and effective language choices.

Conclusion

Candidates on the whole responded well to all of the questions. Many centres had prepared their candidates well and are to be commended for this. Areas for further development and preparation include focusing on evaluating how writers use literary and linguistic devices for the reading question and focusing on candidates' own writing craft for the writing questions. Candidates need to be encouraged to work on the organization of their writing and to bear the intended audience in mind in order to gain access to the higher grades.

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