

Examiners' Report

January 2013

International GCSE English Language
(4EA0)

Paper 2

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Introduction

The paper worked well and the choice of the poem "Disabled" elicited a range of appropriate responses from students from a wide range of abilities. The writing questions allowed plenty of choice, both in terms of topics and of forms of writing.

There was a range of responses and it was evident that some able candidates had been entered. Equally there was evidence of candidates who were struggling with language expression (particularly in the writing) and their understanding was superficial. The influence of a second language for some candidates was obvious in both sections. Timing did not seem to be a problem and the candidates seemed to divide their time appropriately as section B, for the most part, did not seem to be rushed or unfinished

Question 1

Knowledge of the poem was evident and in the majority of answers there was clear engagement with the ideas and the language. The focus was on the task and there was evidence of practice of showing understanding through the use of techniques. This resulted in some very impressive answers which were thoroughly developed with considerable detail and a full range of techniques; these answers demonstrated impressive writing skills in their expression too, so the candidates' ability was evident. In contrast to these impressive answers there were some which focused on the narrative and merely retold what happened in the poem; these were often interspersed with quotations but not in any relevant way. Similarly there were others which listed techniques (almost a 'spotting' exercise) and explained the meaning, but these quotations were unconnected and lacked cohesion.

The focus on the soldier's thoughts and feelings made this a straightforward question for many candidates, who responded well accordingly. They understood the poem and the question, and focused particularly confidently on the contrast between before and after the soldier's war. Many also wrote well on language and poetic techniques.

However, there were a number of candidates, who, it seemed, had not prepared the poem. This meant that they obviously were at a huge disadvantage. Some had completely misunderstood the poem, writing about the soldier now being old, but having had a glorious war. The relationship with women was also not clearly understood by these candidates.

Question 2(a)

Most of the answers on raising the school leaving age were thoughtful and considered, with the ideas being presented in an informed and fluent way. The communication was organised and the points made clearly. It was this question which most able candidates seemed to attempt, often in a very impressive way.

Although it was not the most popular choice in Section 2, stronger candidates tackled it well, consciously using rhetorical devices and being mindful of purpose and audience. Weaker responses were unable to address the topic confidently.

Question 2(b)

The answers often presented a real picture of the need of the various schools, particularly in deprived educational situations and countries. Ideas were interesting and thoughtful and indeed pertinent to the needs of the students. However, at times there was a tendency for a lack of organization in presenting the ideas so the impact for the suggestions was lacking in its delivery and therefore persuasion.

This was a more popular question and generally handled well, with most candidates confidently aware of purpose and tone, and coming up with some good ideas. Weaker responses tended to list rather than develop their initial thoughts. There was not much evidence of planning from weaker candidates.

Question 2(c)

This task produced responses which were not as well considered and there were few which merited the highest band. Some candidates used pre-prepared answers and some were somewhat off-task as a consequence. Too many candidates relied on the narrative device: 'it was all a dream'. Some candidates lost sight of the need for sentence variety, vocabulary range and crafting writing to have an effect on the reader, because they were focused on trying to tell a story. Candidates should plan this question carefully and build this planning time into their timing, to avoid this trap, as outlined below.

This was a very popular question. The title obviously inspired many, but it proved difficult for many of those to come up with an original idea, plan and write in forty minutes. Consequently few planned adequately, which showed in the finished piece. It would be useful if candidates were encouraged to plan and then write a shorter but more structured response, and discouraged from writing something they get carried away with, but which is held together by 'thens'.

Conclusion

All candidates found the paper accessible and were able to demonstrate their reading, understanding and writing skills, across a considerable range of abilities. The vast majority of candidates appeared to find the poem accessible and were able to respond appropriately to the writing questions. Centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with the poems and passages from the anthology, as greater familiarity will elicit more informed responses. As well as spotting literary and linguistic techniques, candidates should be prepared to explain the effects of these techniques. For the writing questions, candidates should become familiar with a range of writing forms and would benefit from practising writing under timed conditions. They should read tasks carefully to ensure that they are writing to the purpose. During the examination, candidates need to pay special attention to spelling, punctuation, organization of paragraphs and grammatical accuracy. On the whole, centres had prepared their students well for this paper.

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