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Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE in English Language A (4EA0) Paper 02

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Overview

International GCSE 4EA0 Paper 2 is a paper lasting one hour and thirty minutes. Question 1 is a reading question based on the Edexcel Anthology and in January 2014 candidates had to respond to the poem "An Unknown Girl". Question 2 is a writing question and candidates have to complete one written piece from a choice of three. The choices for June 2015 were a magazine article about leadership qualities, a talk about modern technology and a story entitled "The Journey".

Examiners felt this was a fair paper. Candidates from a range of abilities were able to gain access to the reading passage and the questions on it. A range of abilities was also represented by the responses to the writing questions.

Reading

Question 1.

Candidates of all abilities appeared to engage with the poem, despite the difficulties its symbolism might have posed, and to understand that the meeting had a metaphorical as well as a literal meaning. Achievement was spread across the mark range. The strongest answers understood that identity was the subject of the poem: how far each character reflected the essence of India. Weaker answers were structured around the four bullet points outlined in the question, while abler candidates immediately commented on the effects of structure and language, rather than leaving discussion of this until the end. However, as a whole, the bullet points were very helpful in focusing the responses. The contrasts between East and West, for example in the references to "hennaing/icing" and "shadow-stitched kameez / balloons", were usually explained clearly by mid-range candidates. Very few linked "nozzle" with "icing" or saw that the allusions in the poem mirrored the way the writer moves from West to East. Similarly, although the technique of repetition was generally noted, there was little reference to the effect of using the present tense throughout the poem.

The poem was generally understood by candidates across the range, with even the weakest able to offer some relevant comments about the writer, the subject and the location. At the bottom, the 'girl' was regularly confused with the poet; at the top, this question of dual identity was appreciated as the theme of the poem. Middle range candidates who knew something of Alvi's background tackled the metaphorical meanings more successfully than those who didn't. The following phrases posed problems: 'studded with neon' (regularly attributed to the 'girl', not the place; ' satin peach knee' (regularly interpreted as alluding to skin, not cloth). However, overall, there were pleasingly few literal readings of the poem. Examiners found the responses to this question largely positive and reported that the question elicited some excellent answers. Candidates generally enjoyed the poem and were able to engage with the text. All aspects of the question were covered, although the candidates who scored in the low bands failed to develop their answers in greater depth and generalised their response. More thorough responses were insightful and consistent, identifying literary techniques used and their effect on the writer and audience. Responses in the top band were focused throughout. Analysis

was sophisticated and discussed language, connotations, shades of meaning and structure. Others made generalised points about cultural identity which lacked textual support, and appeared pre-taught rather than signalling the candidate's own understanding of language use. The boundary between Levels 3 and 4 mapped onto a progression from discussions focussing on elements such as Alvi's portrayal of character and place, towards more sustained analyses of the cultural conflict at the poem's core. The text provided an appropriate level of challenge for candidates working at higher levels; there were some impressively detailed responses which addressed language, structure and form in great depth, as well as many which demonstrated a sensitive engagement with the feelings and issues presented by the poet.

The best candidates showed understanding of the ambiguity in the identity of the unknown girl, querying whether it was the narrator herself by the last stanza, and saw her musing on this as her hand was hennaed. The best responses were perceptive and showed real understanding of the imagery used, explaining nuances well. Weaker candidates sometimes still grasped the conflict the narrator had with her cultural identity but did little more than identify it.

Writing

All three questions seemed to be answered well with minimal confusion about what the question was asking. Most candidates were able to engage successfully with the various titles. Spelling and the use of vocabulary was good. There was little evidence of poor spelling among many responses. The vocabulary used was usually appropriate. Punctuation was generally good to excellent, but there are candidates who show a good control of punctuation, but do not punctuate consistently. Across all three questions, spelling was generally well-controlled, relative to level. However, even many mid-range candidates are still uncertain about sentence division.

Question 2a.

Answers to this question were usually well-developed across the range. Abler candidates structured their ideas clearly around various categories: political, historical, sporting and so on. The weaker candidates tried to write in a generalised way about the qualities needed by a good leader, without exemplification. This approach did not make for interesting reading, and was often typified by repetitive sentences. They would have been more successful had they included personal anecdotes. Abstract concepts such as leadership are rarely handled successfully, in a discursive manner, by candidates at this level. Some candidates found it difficult to sustain agreement between subject and verb. However, those who exemplified their ideas with figures from history and politics did produce thoughtfully developed and well-paragraphed answers. Stronger responses flowed and the progression through the answer was methodical and consistent. They used examples from history to give their argument credibility and demonstrated their understanding of the purpose of the text. Better answers alluded to examples of leaders throughout history, and employed convincing jargon and imperatives. However, there was a tendency for some candidates to over-rely on similar sentence structures, such

as ‘A good leader should…’, which in turn suggested that these candidates’ understanding of purpose and audience was less secure.
Comparatively few responses were submitted for this question, making it more difficult to discern trends. Across the range of levels there was at least some awareness of purpose and intended readership. Structure was a particular strength of responses to this question, with many candidates organising their writing logically and appropriately for the task. The most successful responses were not only cohesive, however, but included thoughtful and engaging examples and evidence.

Some markers observed that audience and purpose is being taught well, with a general feeling that most responses were well targeted and most candidates really knew what they should be doing. The question was considered to be accessible to those candidates who attempted it.

Question 2b.

Examiners agreed that this question produced knowledgeable and interesting answers across the range. The full range of marks was awarded. Candidates wrote confidently and at length. At the top end, 'technology' was understood as devices used in all areas of life: transport, medicine, domestic appliances and personal gadgets. Markers were impressed that many interpreted technology in its widest sense, not just as ipads and smartphones but discussing agricultural technology and technology within travel. These answers used humour and rhetoric effectively. They also challenged the idea that 'easier' necessarily means 'better'. At the bottom, ideas were restricted to mobile phones and computers. The topic was accessible and interesting to candidates. Candidates had a strong opinion on this subject, which was evident in many of the responses. They were aware of audience and purpose and attempted to structure their argument logically.

This question was well-received, with many candidates choosing powerful examples and constructing developed sides to each argument. The best responses showed a secure understanding of their teenage audience, and adapted their tone, register and examples to reflect this. Weaker responses would sometimes move back and forth between arguments without cohesive markers, thus losing a sense of order and logical progression. Across the range, candidates wrote interestingly about the uses and abuses of the various gadgets available today. The purpose of a talk to peers was also generally understood. Whether each device's pluses and minuses was listed in turn, or a generalised approach adopted, dealing with the overall positives and minuses of technology, points were often confidently developed. Weaker answers were distinguished by lack of appropriate paragraphing. At the top, answers dealt fluently with the wider social and national security issues arising from the use of sophisticated technology. Some candidates worked methodically to include a range of persuasive techniques in their writing. There were some impressive responses towards the upper end of the mark range, which engaged the audience in a more individual and nuanced manner.

Question 2c.

This appeared to be the most popular choice for very weak candidates, who wrote literal and chronological accounts of trips they had taken. Lack of paragraphing was a feature of these weaker stories. Examiners also noted that sentence division was often inaccurate, and that second language candidates found it very difficult to write grammatically, especially when trying to use the past tense. Candidates needed more practice in constructing credible narratives and endings. However, the most able crafted interesting stories with varied sentence structures and effective punctuation. Some good stories were written. Weaker responses lacked interest and depth. Candidates attempted to use literary techniques, but not always successfully. The candidates were generally aware of the purpose and the audience and engaged the reader. Stronger responses were structured accurately and literary devices were implemented with good effect. A large range of punctuation was used. However, the use of apostrophes emerged as an area of frequent error.

Candidates responded enthusiastically to this task, however, some weaker candidates neglected to consider their readers as they produced rather dull, factual accounts of long journeys. More sophisticated responses interpreted the title on an emotional and personal level and produced emotive and gripping pieces of writing as a result. Many candidates showed a good understanding of the short story genre, using description and expanded noun phrases well. The question elicited a large number of lurid narratives at the bottom level, which were differentiated into Level 1/2 or Level 2/3 on the basis of their relative clarity and control of paragraphing. However, at the middle and top ranges, accounts based on candidates' real life experiences were often touching. A common problem was how to achieve an effective conclusion; better answers used the flash-back technique successfully, but the weakest tailed off. Level 3 and Level 4 answers were differentiated by the degree to which they were cohesive. As with the previous question on leadership, there was a tendency to paragraph without linking the events, or topics in the case of 2a.

There were a number of excellent responses which demonstrated careful crafting of narrative style and voice. While many candidates focused on a literal 'journey', telling stories of travel and exploration, there were many who explored original and interesting perspectives on the theme. The title allowed a nice wide interpretation of 'journeying', whether an actual journey or a journey to self-knowledge. Some stories were engaging and really seemed to understand the idea of crafting; weaker responses wrote rather plodding, prosaic stories which showed little thought or even, sometimes, an appropriate level of maturity. Organisation seems better year on year, with evidence of good paragraphing and effective introductions and conclusions. Generally, this was considered to be a good paper, allowing all candidates to show their skills and for some to shine.

Grade Boundaries

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