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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2017

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

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January 2017

Publications Code: 4EA0_02_1701_ER

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Paper 2 of IGCSE English Language 4EA0 lasts ninety minutes and is equally divided between reading and writing. Question 1 is a reading question, based on a text drawn from the Edexcel Anthology. Candidates would have seen the text previously. This year the text was a poem, Wilfred Owen's "Disabled". For Question 2, candidates have a choice of three writing questions, of which they choose one. Question 2a was a magazine article about designer clothes, Question 2b was a speech about bullying and Question 2c was a story entitled "Home".

Reading

Question 1

Candidates were well-prepared. There was a strong sense of engagement overall with the reading. There were some really insightful responses at the top end. Very few candidates failed to deal with all the bullet points or to merit at least a Level 2 mark. There was a good spread of marks in this allocation, with some clustering at the L2/3 boundary. The majority understood the soldier's situation and how it had changed, but were not always able to show how the writer achieved the contrast. The difference between less sound L3 and weaker high L2 answers was usually because the former, while having an overall grasp of what war had done to the soldier, were also able to comment on specific language features while the latter, with the same overall grasp, were not, tending to write at length about the 'awfulness of war' rather than directly answering the question. Overall, this was felt to be an excellent choice, which provided plenty of material to write about and was capable of different levels of sensitivity and depths of understanding of the soldier's plight and the context in which his plight came about.

Although the hopelessness of the soldier's present state and the happiness of his previous life were often clearly understood, the understanding of what happened in the war was not. However most saw how the 'blood smear' from the football game contrasted with the loss of blood in the war, with, however, only the strongest answers able to point out the irony. However, the irony of the women's contrasting treatment of the soldier before and after the war was understood by most L4 candidates. The weakest might have been lifted from L1 into L2 had they been given an explanation of the poem's context: World War 1 and the limited care available to the severely wounded at that time. The best answers at Level 5 were impressive for candidates at this age.

Writing

Question 2a

Answers showed a clear interest in, and opinions about, the topic of designer clothes. Many engaged with the question, displaying knowledge of the fashion industry and expressing strong views. Knowledge about the fashion industry and the contrast between its often low paid workers and the high prices demanded by retailers was very good with most candidates referring in detail to named designers, shops and brands. Balanced answers containing

arguments for and against consumers spending a great deal on clothes did not necessarily achieve higher marks than those taking one side or the other. Many candidates wrote with a sense of humour and irony. The main error in mid-range answers was a lack of appropriate paragraphing. Many tended to write a speech rather than an article. Strong answers showed a sophisticated grasp of the issues, appreciating that the original basic human need for clothing has by now extended to a need to dress appropriately in the work place. Weaker answers were identifiable by their use of simple assertions, for example 'It's wrong to buy...'

Question 2b

There was genuine involvement with the question and the problem of bullying. There was an overwhelming sense of support in the pieces and candidates appeared genuinely concerned about the issue. Candidates overall communicated good understanding of the topic and offered reasonable suggestions to the audience. The obvious weakness evident across the middle range was the repetitive vocabulary; for example, some candidates had difficulty in finding alternative terms for 'bullying'. Sound answers began by identifying and explaining the issue and giving examples. It was clear that methods of dealing with this behaviour were not generally successful: answers usually concluded with the idea that eventually bullies would 'lose interest'. As with 2a, paragraphing in mid-range answers was often mechanical rather than reflecting change of topic and assertions marked the weakest responses. In both 2a and 2b, there was a marked lack of overall cohesion with ideas being introduced in a fragmentary manner rather than in a logical sequence. Nevertheless few candidates failed to write a speech.

Question 2c

This was the most popular option but some markers found it the most difficult to mark. Apart from some candidates being unsure about the meaning of the word 'home', the main error was the failure to write, as instructed, a story. There were many mid-range answers which offered a series of impressions of what home meant to the writers. However, these were often more successful than those which attempted narratives, but used the word 'home' to write fantasies which had limited connection with that stimulus. Simple sequences of events with insecure control of sentences and vocabulary, along with endings in which the writer died, characterised many low L2 answers. More thought was needed by candidates as to how to structure the story around the initial idea. However, there were some exceptional responses, with careful crafting and a real focus on creating an atmosphere and storytelling.

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