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Examiners' Report
Principal Examiner Feedback
Summer 2017

Pearson Edexcel IGCSE
In English Language (4EA0) Paper 02

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IGCSE English Language 4EA0

Paper 2

June 2017

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 an extract from a novel, "The Last Night", from *Charlotte Gray*. For Question 2, candidates have a choice of three writing questions, of which they choose one. Question 2a was an essay arguing whether cities were dangerous, dirty and crowded or not, Question 2b was a letter advising on a new building to benefit the local community and Question 2c was a story beginning "I never thought such an amazing thing could happen to me".

Principal Examiner's Report

Reading

Question 1

The extract 'The Last Night' (from *Charlotte Gray*) was accessible to many candidates who handled the material well. Most responses selected relevant examples of how Faulks created sympathy for the children. Some candidates followed the format of answering the first three bullets and then commenting on language at the conclusion of the essay. More successful answers were able to deduce how sympathy was presented and could link examples to the writer's technique. Sincere and personal responses were evident with insightful observations - eg 'the crib is a wooden coffin', the postcards could be epitaphs. Evidence of astute comments, for example, the café's lighting reflecting the normality of life to the horror which was to ensue, were to be commended.

Most candidates used short, embedded quotations to support points made. A few weaker responses drifted into too much context. The bullet points help to structure responses. There were accurate and observant examples of less obvious adults' contribution to the experience such as the policeman and the commandant. There was a full range of responses from 0-15. Weaker responses identified examples of personification and onomatopoeia, but failed to elaborate on their effect. Better responses identified the third person form of the narrative which gives an omniscient viewpoint. Many had been clearly moved by previous readings, which helped a more immediate engagement with the text.

There seemed to be an improved standard in approaching the question for this series in comparison to previous ones. Higher scoring responses showed a perceptive and/or assured engagement with the text by virtue of weighing up the language features in view of how the children were described within the run of the narrative, and being balanced by contextual factors. Often the most successful answers showed an awareness of the settings - historical/political and geographical - with which to illuminate their actual response to the use of language. Lower level scripts often did not dip beyond a surface-level consideration of language, so much so that in some cases they clung too closely to the structure of the bullet points to frame their answers or responded simply as a narrative. Sometimes an overuse of quotation or use of overly-long examples from the text, indicated insecurity in reacting to the question needs. Candidates were more successful when they were able to name and discuss a range of language, structure and form devices from the extract. Many candidates applied historical and social context which when linked with the question was successful, although not strictly necessary. Stronger responses linked different aspects of the text such as character, setting and writing style to sympathy. The poignant stimulus material provided some very strong answers and allowed students to fully engage with the task. Overall this was a good question and source material that students could engage with. Few answers showed limited understanding of the identification of language, structure and form, with little evidence of appropriate examples to support ideas. Few answers were largely descriptive, with some comment on the language, structure and form with some evidence of appropriate examples to support ideas. Many answers showed a sound understanding of a range of language, structure and form features, with sound use of appropriate examples to support ideas. Many students showed a sustained and thorough response using language, structure and form features, with developed examples to support ideas. Many students showed an assured or perceptive evaluation of language, structure and form and their effect on the reader. Relevant subject terminology was integrated and discriminating.

Although there was a general understanding, even at the lowest levels, of the situation and ultimate fate of the children, the sequence of events and locations described in the text was not always grasped. Candidates often thought that the boys were sleeping 'in a stable' rather than the barracks mentioned, or that they were in a train carriage at the beginning of the passage. Similarly the identities of the individual adults - the woman with the pail, the gendarme - caused confusion. Analysis of the language of a text can only be attempted after the basics - setting, characters, events have been fully understood; otherwise, interpretation and attribution of features will be incorrect. However, the underlying themes of pathos and cruelty were generally recognised across the range, as were the contrasts between innocence and brutality.

Sometimes higher level answers which chose to focus on the question paper bullet points missed the opportunity to comment on the overall structure of the text, with its increasing atmosphere of menace as the bus approached. The significance of the fact that the thrown scraps of food failed to reach the children received little attention, even by top level candidates.

Writing

Question 2a

This was a popular choice and elicited interesting responses. Most candidates tackled this question with a high degree of confidence. Overall it was handled very well, and most candidates were able to score reasonably highly even when they lacked control of expression or proper structuring. Most candidates were in favour of city living and put forward valid points of better job opportunities, improved transport systems, and more immediate healthcare. More able candidates developed their ideas around these categories. Many responses were well-paragraphed, methodical and consistent. Weaker candidates ignored arguing either for or against the statement and proceeded to put both points of view. The use of emotive language was apparent in opposition to city living, especially in regard to pollution. This question gave candidates the opportunity to be both argumentative and creative. For those with more limited writing skills, the better prepared candidates were able to pick up significant marks from a carefully structured response. A minority of responses were discursive rather than argumentative. Candidates approached this response with sensitivity and personal experiences. Stronger responses considered multiple reasons for or against the argument.

Examiners found that this popular question was generally wellanswered across the range. Most candidates adopted a for or against approach based on their own experience. However, there were praiseworthy attempts in even L2/low L3 answers to adopt the role of 'devil's advocate...' Whether cities were felt to be dangerous or exciting, descriptions were often evocative, showing skill in conjuring the desired dark or lively atmosphere. Control of paragraphing and punctuation was found to be reasonably accurate.

Question 2b

Most candidates were adept at ordering a series of persuasive reasons for the use of the new building, and structured the letter appropriately. Some less successful answers lost their way a little, and ended up offering a series of possible uses for the building without attempting to persuade the audience towards one in particular. This might have been

an effective approach, but often these candidates offered little in the way of control of phrasing or overall structure.

Most candidates were familiar with an accurate letter format. Tone and style were also applicable to the task. Some responses were a little formulaic, but still managed to produce tangible ideas for the new building. A couple of ideas such as a fitness centre and a sports outlet were more developed than the 'tardis' approach where the building housed a shopping mall, library, a health centre and tuition centre. Most letters were well constructed with successful paragraphing and sentence structure. Responses were, on the whole, shorter than for either Q2a or Q2c.

This was the least popular option but those choosing it usually framed their letters clearly, and sustained purpose and audience well. Higher level answers offered practical and detailed descriptions of uses for the building, while the less able wrote vaguely about 'sport centres'. Nonetheless, across the range, the need to persuade was understood. Some examiners reported a lack of imagination in what they read, although it could be argued that the context of the subject required clarity rather than verbosity.

Question 2c

There was an abundance of engaging and well-structured responses to the story prompt, with some particularly high-scoring levels of engagement. The vast majority of candidates structured their answers solidly, and showed some facility in applying methods to engage the audience, including some interesting ranges of vocabulary and rhetorical techniques. Some lower-scoring scripts struggled to express themselves and/or produced very short and uninspiring passages.

Some candidates across the levels of achievement ignored the rubric request to begin their story with the given line, or used it at the end of the story. However, this did not detract from the quality of the responses. Thoughtful stories on popular topics of winning lottery tickets, scoring crucial goals, secret treasure trove chests in caves after long treks through Amazon rainforests were evident.

Some were entertaining and often handled dialogue well. There was real evidence of trying to craft the story for the reader's engagement with a full range of punctuation, descriptive imagery and developed characters and plots. Weaker responses focused on meeting the perfect boyfriend, being abducted by aliens, and astounding medical recoveries. These were often plodding and prosaic and English as a second language students struggled with tense and grammar.

Constructing more creditable endings requires further practice. A small portion of candidates seemed to have pre-written answers for this where they tried to shoe horn a story that they had previously written into this answer which really did not suit the question. Literary

techniques were often applied with originality. This was an excellent question which allowed all candidates to reveal their skills and for some to really engage and amaze the reader. It was noted that candidates paid less attention to technical accuracy in these responses, perhaps swept away by the power of the narrative. It seemed a very open question that allowed students the freedom to write about whatever they desired.

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