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Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

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In English Language A (4EA1) Paper 01R: Non-Fictional Texts and Transactional Writing

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Introduction

June 2018 saw the first series of the new International GCSE English Language Specification A and this examination paper is Unit 1: Non-fiction and Transactional Writing which is sat by all candidates.

The paper is organised into two parts.

Section A, worth a total of 45 marks, tests reading skills and is based on an unseen passage and a text from the International GCSE English Anthology with a total word count across the two extracts of approximately 2000 words. In this series, the unseen extract was adapted from *A right royal time in Bhutan* by Lisa Grainger in which the writer describes her first impressions of Bhutan. The Anthology text was the extract *From Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan* in which Jamie Zeppa writes about her early days in Bhutan where she had moved to be a teacher.

Section B, also worth a total of 45 marks, offers candidates a choice of two transactional writing tasks. A particular form will always be specified and for this series the two tasks were to write a magazine article entitled 'Dream Destinations' or a speech giving views on the statement 'Life in today's world is just so busy that we do not have time to value the things that really matter.'

The paper was well received with examiners commenting on how the unseen text was accessible to students of all abilities and provided ample material for the comparison question. It was clear that many candidates engaged fully with both texts and responded with interest and enthusiasm.

There was evidence that most candidates had been well-prepared for the examination but they should be reminded to read all the printed instructions on the examination paper very carefully and follow them precisely.

Section A

Questions 1-3 are based on the unseen extract and are all assessed for AO1: Read and understand a variety of texts, selecting and interpreting information, ideas and perspectives.

Question 1

This question, which tests the skills of selection and retrieval is intended to serve as a straightforward way into the paper and the vast majority of candidates were able to select two apt words or phrases that described Bhutan. There were a number of possible choices and the most popular were 'Switzerland-sized' and 'Himalayan nation'. Some candidates seemed to believe that only single word answers are acceptable for Question 1 and offered 'sandwiched' but, without the rest of the phrase, this was too imprecise. It is important, therefore, that candidates understand that a phrase might be several words. Where other candidates missed out on marks, it was because they had chosen a word or phrase that did not appear within lines 1-3, for example 'ancient kingdom' which is in line 4. It is important that for the first three questions students are encouraged to mark the relevant sections of the text.

Question 2

This is a 4 mark question that requires candidates to interpret information, ideas and perspectives. For this examination they were asked to describe what the writer does in Bhutan, using lines 25-42. There were a number of possible responses to this question and many candidates achieved full or nearly full marks by working through the given lines and clearly describing the different activities in which the writer engaged. It is a requirement of the question that candidates write in their own words and it was often the case that where candidates did not achieve full marks it was because they copied large amounts of the text. Whilst it might be possible to gain four marks by making fewer than four points if they are well-developed, the most successful approach for candidates is to make four clear and distinct points. However, it is important to remember that the question asks for a description and therefore, although it is not necessary to write at great length, it is not acceptable to bullet point answers and the response must be written in full and complete sentences that clearly show understanding and secure interpretation. A few candidates did not achieve full marks because they provided an overview of the whole extract and did not focus on the question or the given line references.

Question 3

This is the final AO1 question; it is worth 5 marks and, like question 2, requires candidates to show their understanding of the text by selecting and interpreting ideas, information and perspectives. For this examination, they were asked to explain what we, as readers, learn about the hotels, using lines 43-52. In question 3, candidates are told that they 'may support' their points 'with **brief** quotations' and many did so to good effect. Whilst it may be possible to achieve full marks for question 3, without making five distinct points, dependent on the quality and depth of the answer, many candidates adopted the successful approach of making five clear points written in full and complete sentences and supported by relevant brief quotations. There is no need for comments on the language used in the quotations and examiners noted that a number of candidates spent time on analysis of language and structure, an AO2 requirement, for which they could not here be credited. There were a number of possible points that could be made and most candidates gained full or nearly full marks, but where this was not the case it was because they had made only a couple of points or failed to focus on the question and offered points that related to other parts of the text. Some candidates moved away from the topic to offer their own perspectives on the issues raised in the extract but this was not a requirement of the question and therefore meant that they could not be rewarded. Some candidates expected long quotations to act as a substitute for their own understanding and commentary but answers including overlong quotations rarely gained full marks. The best answers used a good balance of short quotation and explanation, paying attention to how many marks the question is worth.

Question 4

This question will always be on Text Two, the Anthology text, and is assessed for AO2: Understand and analyse how writers use linguistic and structural devices to achieve their effects. It is therefore a more challenging and discriminatory question and is worth 12 marks divided over 5 levels.

In this examination, candidates were asked how the writer, Jamie Zeppa, uses language and structure in the extract *From Beyond the Sky and the Earth: A Journey into Bhutan* to interest and engage the reader. This piece contains a wide range of features of language and structure as exemplified in the mark scheme but examiners were advised that these are just examples of possible points that could be made and instructed that they must reward any valid points that candidates make that are securely rooted in the text. There does not need to be an equal number of points on language and structure but both should be addressed as, indeed, they were by nearly all candidates.

Some candidates spent too long on an introduction that set out what they intended to do and a conclusion that summed up what they had done, neither of which contributed usefully to the acquisition of marks and time could have been spent more wisely by starting with an immediate focus on the use of language or structure.

At the lowest level there were just a few candidates to whom the Anthology text seemed unfamiliar but examiners commented that nearly all of the responses they saw offered at the least a clear understanding of the text. At this level candidates were able to select apt quotations to support their points and use subject terminology but sometimes this led to little more than feature spotting with some comment on the generic effect of these such as 'short sentences create impact' or 'this encourages the reader to read on' rather than considering the effect within this particular text. Some candidates at this level also tended to simply describe what the writer had written in chronological order or spent too long on the opening paragraph. Whilst nearly all candidates commented on the repetition of the word 'mountains' in the opening sentences, stronger candidates were able to select other key language features such as the opening description of the landscape looking as if it had been sculpted by a child and offer original and insightful analysis of this e.g. that her analogy 'allows the reader to understand that she views Bhutan as alien-like and unreal with the rough and uneven design making it seem like a child's creation.' This is a very long extract but successful candidates were able to make effective points about the different elements of the country that Zeppa covers. Some students felt that Zeppa expressed only negative thoughts about Bhutan with comments about the poor food and cold air and omitted to mention the positive points that the author also makes.

There is no requirement for any comparison with Text Two in this question.

Question 5

This question provides the only assessment in the specification of AO3: Explore links and connections between writers' ideas and perspectives, as well as how these are conveyed.

Comparison is a new skill to be tested and this question is the most demanding of those in Section A and, with 22 marks distributed between 5 levels, carries almost half of the total marks available for reading so it is extremely important that candidates allow time to plan carefully and then aim to make a good range of relevant points.

Examiners recognised the challenge of the question and it was pleasing to note that nearly all candidates rose to this and managed to make links at some level between the two texts. One examiner commented that 'some really excellent analysis was evident'.

At the lower end, candidates tended to make obvious comparisons for example 'both extracts are about Bhutan' and 'both are written in the first person' and often these responses became narrative with greater emphasis on one text. Candidates at this level were, however, generally able to draw links between the writers' ideas with some degree of success and make some straightforward comments about language and/or structure. Candidates should note that the picture that accompanies Text One is there to provide a visual aid to them but is not a feature of the extract itself that needs to be commented on. Examiners felt that some students would benefit from greater guidance on what ideas or techniques might be used for effective comparisons e.g. comparing the writers' use of hyphenated words is not particularly convincing. More assured responses included astute analysis of language, tone and purpose as well as content. These candidates were also able to look at the writers' perspectives and there were insightful statements such as: 'The writer of Text Two seems to observe the Bhutanese through the eyes of a foreigner rather than socially integrating with them as the author of Text One attempts to do at times.' The range of comparisons, depth of comment on both ideas and perspectives and the use of appropriate references were all discriminators.

There are different ways to approach this question but examiners noted that the most successful responses made each point a valid and appropriate comparison with supporting references from both extracts; this led to the balance required for marks within levels 4 and 5.

Section B

Candidates are required to answer just one writing task but it carries half of the total marks available for the paper and so they must ensure that they allow sufficient time to plan and organise their response.

There are now two assessment objectives for writing.

AO4: Communicate effectively and imaginatively, adapting form, tone and register of writing for specific purposes and audiences. (27 marks spread over 5 levels)

AO5: Write clearly, using a range of vocabulary and sentence structures, with appropriate paragraphing and accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation. (18 marks spread over 5 levels)

Question 6

This question was very accessible and one examiner noted how there were some excellent responses that 'were inspiring, broad-ranging and expressed with passion'. Many candidates chose to reflect back on a favourite holiday destination, some did indeed write about the places they dream of visiting, including Space, and a number chose to write about their home city or country. The places picked ranged from Bali and Argentina to Switzerland and Russia and many accounts were persuasive and exhilarating in their enthusiasm. Whilst it was perfectly acceptable for candidates to choose to write about Bhutan based on what they had read in the extracts, a few relied too heavily on these sources, to the extent of directly lifting material and copying words, phrases and sentences for which they could receive no credit. At the lower levels, candidates provided straightforward descriptions of attractions offered in various places and the weather to be expected with some comments on why they would like to visit. These responses were often lacking paragraphs and a sense of structure. More successful responses acknowledged the given form through use of a heading and adopted a lively and engaging register, perhaps with some direct address to the reader as in one candidate's exhortation to 'Buckle up your snowboots because this holiday is not about sight-seeing.' There was evidence of careful language choice as in the candidate who wrote about the Jeita Grotto in Lebanon and described it evocatively as 'like a secret chapel hidden beneath the chaotic city.' The best writing showed subtlety and maturity and connected strongly with the reader with examiners commenting that they would now like to visit many of the destinations about which candidates had written.

Question 7

This question proved to be slightly more popular than question 6 and one examiner noted that 'there was evidence that pupils had been very well taught about the persuasive and rhetorical devices appropriate to this form of transactional writing.' The idea that 'life in today's world is just so busy that we do not have time to value the things that really matter' clearly resonated strongly with many candidates and they spoke forcefully and persuasively about what we should value, most often this encompassed family and friends but they also considered positive qualities such as kindness and tolerance and the importance of appreciating the beauty of the world. Examiners particularly enjoyed marking this question with one stating how it was 'interesting to hear the 'voice' of the student' and they felt that most candidates who tackled this question did so with a good degree of success. Where responses were weaker, there was focus on just one part of the question's statement which led to a limited range of ideas, punctuation and grammar lacked accuracy and there was some inappropriate use of colloquialisms such as 'gonna' and 'wanna'.

To achieve the highest level in AO5, writing needs to be 'perceptive', 'subtle' and 'sophisticated' and for AO6 there needs to be accuracy but also a 'strategic' use of an 'extensive vocabulary' and an assured and controlled use of a range of sentence structures 'to achieve particular effects'. Those who did achieve this level frequently opened their speech with an intriguing question, a shocking statement or a short sentence and proceeded to explore and develop their ideas with fluency, clarity and conviction even if the tone did become a little

disheartened at times such as the candidate who concluded with the lament that 'in this world my oration will soon be forgotten amidst the flood of demands you will undoubtedly be besieged with.'

Concluding advice.

Candidates should:

- be provided with plenty of opportunities to practise reading and responding to unseen passages under timed conditions
- be aware of the different assessment objectives to ensure that they focus their answers specifically on what the question has asked for
- answer Question 2 in their own words
- use quotations to support, rather than make points for Question 3
- not spend time analysing language quoted in Question 3
- consider the effects of language and structure features within the context of the given extract in Question 4
- avoid commenting on only a small part of the extract in Question 4
- not waste time on a general introduction or conclusion in Question 4- every sentence should be earning marks
- make a range of comparative points in Question 5 and link similar elements such as content, theme, tone, purpose, narrative voice, language
- take time to make a brief plan for the higher tariff questions (5 and 6 or 7)
- consider given form and audience for the writing task and use these to inform register and tone
- try to use a wide vocabulary and varied sentence structures
- aim for a structured, cohesive and complete piece of writing
- allow time to proof-read in order to achieve the highest possible degree of accuracy
- read all instructions carefully
- attempt every question