

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

(9270/1) Paper 1

Report on the examination

June 2022

REPORT ON EXAMINATION: INTERNATIONAL GCSE ENGLISH LANGUAGE 9270/1 PAPER 1 JUNE 2022

Introduction

This was a return to the summer series for the International GCSE specification and the entry has increased considerably since the June 2019 series. Almost all students completed both sections in the allotted time and the standard of responses was generally very good.

Section A

The passage for reading was an extract from a memoir, recording the writer's visit to her long-lost family in Latvia, many years after her Grandmother fled during the Russian invasion. It proved to be an accessible extract and students engaged well with the literal detail as well as providing ample opportunities for inference, analysis and supported interpretation. The three bands in the mark scheme for each question, excepting Q1 which has two bands, reflect progression from literal responses with simple comment, to those which use detail to develop some comment/explanation, to those which explore and analyse aspects of the text, offering developed, considered comment and inference.

Centres should be aware that, although examiners will have expectations of the quality of responses at various levels of achievements and the skills likely to be shown within each band, they have no expectation that specific content from the extract will be used and are instructed, through the mark scheme, that all valid responses should be rewarded. Students who have been encouraged to read a wide range of good quality literary non-fiction, explore meaning and stylistic qualities, and develop an independent response based on textual evidence, are likely to do well in this section.

Centres new to this specification are reminded that there is no set number of questions, nor any pre-determined area of focus for the questions. The questions arise from the chosen text. They are linked with the Assessment Objectives and are considered to be the best questions to ask on the given text. The best responses are produced by students who have developed their skills of interpretation, inference, analysis and exploration of ideas, language and imagery, and are able to articulate their ideas in response to a range of questions.

Question 1

This question, based on lines 1-10, required students to identify and use relevant detail about what was learnt about the woman who lead the writer into the house. Most students achieved marks beyond the 'identify relevant details' 1-3 band by collating a range of detail. Those who achieved the higher marks offered some inference regarding what is suggested by the detail. For example:

"The woman 'drew a balled-up handkerchief from her cuff' and was seen to 'dab it at her eyes', suggesting that she is feeling emotional or is overwhelmed by the writer's arrival and perhaps what it stands for".

Question 2

This question looked at lines 11-31, which gave a description of the writer viewing a photograph album with the woman, who is discovered to be her grandmother's sister. The question stem asked what was learnt about the grandmother and her siblings and lead the students to display the skills of selecting and commenting on detail. Many students focused on the details and were able to retrieve a selection of details about the siblings, achieving marks within the middle band of 3-4. However, those students who

offered a more detailed overview, were able to synthesize information and possibly infer in their responses, were able to move into the upper band and achieve top marks. For example:

“The image shows the family as unified, all together. However, this is then subverted when Ausma states ‘your grandmother’s stories aren’t my stories’. Ausma’s reference to Livija as ‘your grandmother’ perhaps suggests a disconnection between the sisters, and could convey there was a break in their relationship.”

Question 3

This question used the stem of ‘What’ and referred students to explain what the writer discovers about ‘her long-lost family’. The question required students to select relevant detail and then comment on this, perhaps referring to the writer’s feelings. Many students fell within the middle band of 3-4 marks, explaining that the writer discovers her family is ‘large and consists of many generations’. However, those who reached the upper band demonstrated the ability to collate a range of varied detail and perhaps refer to more subtle points, such as:

“The writer appears surprised, or perhaps emotional, about the fact that the youngest member of the family has a name very similar to her grandmother’s name. The way she asks them to repeat it several times suggests she wants to confirm that it is similar. This also suggests to her that, despite the separation, Livija was still very much loved and part of the family and this name was a gesture of remembrance.”

Question 4

This question referred to lines 52-68 of the extract, in which the writer describes how her mention of the family farm is met with a silence from the family. The question used the stem of ‘How’ to elicit responses that focused on language and techniques used by the writer to ‘create a sense of mystery around the farm’. Many students were able to successfully draw out examples of authorial technique and offer some explanation of how this created mystery. However, the absence of more detailed ‘examination’ of these techniques and detailed comment on the effects achieved, meant that responses often remained within the middle band of 3-4. Students sometimes fell into collating relevant detail with little comment on how these lines created the effect of mystery. However, those students who were able to examine the effects, and offer a personal response were able to achieve the higher marks in the top band, for example:

“The writer describes how the mention of the farm was something ‘soft’ and ‘vulnerable’, conveying the idea that the farm was a fragile and emotive topic. This is further enhanced by comparing it to ‘things that are revealed when an old log is lifted’, creating the impression that the farm is a subject which is hidden, pushed away into the back of memories and forgotten, like the life which hides beneath a log. It could perhaps also suggest a sense of decay, which might be revealed and cause sadness for the family.”

Question 5

Question 5 focused on the final lines of the extract, lines 69-94. It used the stem of ‘What methods does the writer use’ and required students to explain the effect and examine how the writer recreated the scene for the reader. A few students focused on what was happening rather than how the scene was recreated, therefore missing the point of the question. However, most students moved into the middle and upper bands. There was more focus on detail in general, with explanations relating to how the scene was first conveyed through stories the writer had been told by her grandmother, with some good focus on how the writer uses this to then contrast with the description of the damage. Those students who

achieved in the upper band tended to focus on more judicious detail and technique, developing comment on the use of personification used through this part of the text. For example:

“The place is isolated and the writer personifies it as she recognizes it in the descriptions in her grandmother’s stories, commenting that it is like ‘the faces of the very elderly’ where you can recognize ‘every age they have ever been’. It is as if the writer can see all the stories of her grandmother, which return to her as she describes the initial scene to the reader, allowing us to experience it for the first time with her. This is then contrasted with further personification of the damage – comparing it to ‘flaps of cartilage’, like it is a wounded person, damaged and unable to maintain its façade.”

Question 6

This question required students to look at the whole of the extract and consider what they had learnt about the importance of the visit for the writer. Most students did well on this question, making relevant comment about the writer’s feelings and emotions and referring to relevant detail. It was pleasing to see many students selecting detail from across the extract, rather than focusing on particular sections. The students who fell into the middle band focused on meeting her family and tended to select detail and make brief comment on it, such as:

“The writer wanted to meet her long-lost family. She realizes quickly that she is part of a much bigger family than she originally imagined as she comments about there being ‘so many generations’ in the room.”

Those awarded marks in the 6-8 range offered more developed comment on a range of details, often with insightful comment, for example:

“The writer has questions which her new found family have the answers to, particularly related to the farm. It is clear that all her questions are rooted to her grandmother and that is why it has been so important for her to actually meet the family in person. It is like a tribute to her grandmother. The fact the family say they have ‘waited’ for the writer, also emphasizes the importance of this visit for the family as a whole.”

Section B

Students are advised to spend an hour on Section B. Whilst students are not given a guide as to length of writing, the size of handwriting being such a variable factor, it is expected that the essay will be suitably developed and structured. Students who offer very brief and/or undeveloped responses inevitably limit their potential achievement.

The Mark Scheme is divided into two parts. The first part is designed to assess W1 (communication and content), W2 (variety and effectiveness of sentence structure) and W3 (organisation and structure), with each strand being represented by a bullet point. The second template is used to assess W4, technical accuracy in grammar, punctuation and spelling.

For some students taking this exam, English was a second language. Whilst this, inevitably, gave rise to grammatical errors, it remained possible to gain marks in the higher bands through sophisticated use of detail and vocabulary, effective sentence structures, sound organisation, and high levels of accuracy in spelling and punctuation.

On the whole, it was encouraging to see students using a varied and effective vocabulary and considering the use of sentences and punctuation. Perhaps something to bear in mind when teaching the writing section would be to model the use of a range of punctuation and sentence structures as a way of creating effects, particularly in narrative and descriptive writing.

There was little evidence of planning on the exam papers themselves and it would be worthwhile for teachers to model and encourage planning for the different writing styles to ensure that responses are well organized, clear in their purpose and students are able to concentrate on the quality of their writing over the content.

Question 7

This was a popular question, perhaps due to the coursework option being taken and students feeling well prepared for this style of writing. Students tackled the statement, 'Family is always more important than friends' from often very personal perspectives, thinking about their own experiences and perhaps relating to their own cultures. Many students commented on the support of families in all situations and the longevity of family relationships being important factors. Responses to this question were often well structured, some acknowledged a counter argument, commenting on friends being chosen, and reiterated a clear viewpoint. There was some evidence of a range of devices being used, sometimes quite effectively, for example, using quotations about the family, which were then referred to and expanded upon. On the whole, students offered well considered and mature responses which were enjoyable to read.

Question 8

The descriptive question required students to 'Describe a place you know from childhood that seems different to you now'. The responses were varied with descriptions of countries, cities, particular buildings and also personal responses which referred to sites related to the students themselves. Students were seen to structure their writing effectively to enhance the change in the described place. There was evidence of some descriptions falling into an almost discursive style and lacking in descriptive detail when explaining their particular place. It would be worthwhile focusing on some modelling of organisation of description to ensure that students are able to develop detail and make use of linguistic devices in their writing.

Question 9

This narrative question elicited some interesting and engaging stories about 'Memories'. Some of the stronger students drew on engaging and developing plots. Although this type of question can be problematic for students to be able to construct a narrative, whilst also demonstrating engaging vocabulary and detail, there was still evidence of sound ability in this writing style. However, there was a tendency with some students to fall into description with little evidence of plot. It would be useful for centres to perhaps prepare students for narrative writing with focus on narrative structure and how this differs to description. It is also worth noting that there was some incredible use of high-level vocabulary. However, at times this was sometimes misplaced or overused, resulting in confused and difficult to follow writing.

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