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ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Papers 0510/01 and 0510/02

Reading and Writing

General comments

Virtually all candidates seem to have been entered for the appropriate tier.

Examiners were especially pleased by many responses to **Part 3** in particular: candidates are using much more relevant vocabulary, interesting description and idioms. This section of the Paper shows improvement session on session.

In both Core and Extended Papers fewer problems are being found with candidates failing to observe rubric instructions. In Paper 01 problems over instructions such as 'tick' or 'circle' in the form filling exercise are decreasing.

Word length is still a problem: many candidates in **Part 2 Exercise 2** (the summary task) exceeded the maximum word length significantly; by contrast in **Part 3** it was often hard for some candidates to write to the minimum word length.

Examiners are concerned that poor handwriting is marring a significant amount of scripts. A handful of candidates are still writing in pencil; black or dark blue ink must be used.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Exercise 1

Not surprisingly, this exercise proved accessible and was done reasonably well by candidates in both the core and extended tiers.

- (a) This was usually correct, although some answers omitted 'business district' and a few wrote that it was in a 'quiet residential area' which was only a partial answer. A few less able candidates wrongly lifted the information in the first sentence.
- (b) There were a lot of acceptable options here, and most candidates fared well. The most popular answers were 'friendly staff' or 'experience'.
- (c) This proved more difficult, and often candidates wrote about European beverages only.
- (d) While generally well answered on Paper 02, many of those doing Paper 01 found difficulty with this question, frequently giving answers which would have been relevant for (e).
- (e) This was the least well answered question in this exercise, with much wholesale and indiscriminate lifting of 'the intimate atmosphere...'. Only the most able were able to get behind the idea that the likely location would be indoors somewhere.
- (f) (Paper 02 only.) This was generally tackled well.

Exercise 2

The gymnasts (Paper 01 only)

This was a fairly accessible exercise for the majority of Core candidates.

- (a) Only a small number of candidates gave wrong answers - especially 'Roma', 'Rome' or 'Italy' -- and in the main this was an easy first question for most.
- (b)(i) This was generally correct.
 - (ii) A common mistake here was to repeat the idea in (i).
- (c) Many candidates were not precise enough and gave only 'faulty' as an answer.
- (d) Usually candidates lifted correctly from the text.

Chimpanzees (Paper 02 only)

This was a very accessible exercise for most candidates who, on the whole, gained reasonable marks. The main difficulties were encountered in (b) and (d). A small minority of candidates left this exercise blank; they may have spent more time on Part 3 (possibly tackling this section of the Paper first), at the expense of some more easily gained marks.

- (a) This was mainly answered correctly. The most common answers were 'dense woodland' or 'tropical forest'.
- (b) This was a good discriminator. Some answers lifted the wrong idea from the text about baby chimps riding on mothers' backs or 'forged a strong bond'. This did not answer the question. By contrast, those who had really understood the text were able to deduce the correct answer and lift correctly. Few candidates gave the answers 'isn't weaned' or 'dependant on mother's milk'.
- (c) This posed very few difficulties for the candidates.
- (d) This posed few difficulties for the more able candidates who recognised that the problems lay in the hunting of the animals or the destruction of their habitat. Some were distracted by the idea that chimps sometimes fight and kill each other, not realising that this could not account for the decline in numbers.

Exercise 3

This was quite challenging for many candidates and quite a few did not do this exercise either on Paper 01 or 02, perhaps because they wanted to spend (or had spent) more time on Part 3.

- (a) This was answered well by many. Wrong answers usually included facts about the location of the Tharus. It is likely that such cases resulted because candidates simply failed to read the question properly, not recognising that the key question word was *why*, not 'what' or 'where'.
- (b) This proved more challenging. Some candidates gave only a partial answer. They knew that the area had been separated from the outside world but did not continue the answer to include a reason, and so failed to gain a mark. Correct answers chose the idea that mosquitoes and malaria had prevented access.
- (c)(d)(e) These posed very few problems.
- (f) This proved more of a stumbling block. A significant number gave only partial answers instead of writing about the eradication of malaria.
- (g) This also proved hard for some candidates who only gave a partial lifted answer such as 'the barrier to outside encroachment', not having realised the significance of the previous phrase, 'so too'.

Part 2

Exercise 1

- (a) This was usually successfully attempted.
- (b) Most candidates gave 'religious reasons', having successfully lifted from the end of paragraph four. Some candidates confused this answer with the response to (d).
- (c) Again quite a large number of candidates got this right and correctly identified the two stars by name. Candidates who wrote the names of the constellations did not get the mark.
- (d) This was a more discriminating task, and many candidates struggled to get the correct answer: either they repeated the answer already given in (b), or they did not include the idea that the Egyptians wanted to *find* the pole.
- (e) Here only the most able candidates were able to find a correct response. (There were several possibilities, most usually, archaeologist (even if spelled incorrectly). Many answers said that Kate Spence was a *doctor* working at Cambridge University which was not exact enough in this context, or that she was an *astrologist*, again unfortunately the wrong choice of lexis.
- (f) In spite of the complexity of the text and the ideas it contained, a pleasing number of candidates managed to give a correct and coherent answer including the relevant points and managing to use some of their own words. This was a complicated question, but it was managed well on the whole.
- (g) Weaker candidates merely wrote about the building of the pyramids and the dates when this was achieved, without much recourse to the method used.

Exercise 2

This was quite well done by many at both Core and Extended but many candidates are significantly exceeding the stipulated word length. There was much recourse to lifting from the text, one factor behind the excessive length of some of the answers. Candidates must be reminded that a summary question of this sort has a set word length and part of the skill in answering this question successfully is to give a succinct response. Candidates who exceed the word limit penalise themselves as very often their content points fall outside the allowed word length, and they can never be awarded the maximum language mark if they go over the specified word length.

In general, many of the candidates managed to identify sufficient content points, although their language mark for the task was fairly low due to undue reliance on lifting. Even able candidates quoted figures and percentages, which was not necessary. This was especially noticeable with Core candidates who sometimes lifted whole chunks of the text which were virtually meaningless in the context.

Exercise 3

Form Filling - Paper 01 only

This was very well done in most cases and it is pleasing that candidates have become better in carrying out the instructions to circle and tick accurately. There were very few misunderstandings (few candidates gave their own details). The main difficulties were in the section 'Purpose of Money to be Raised' and in circling the correct prize for which the candidate would be eligible. Many candidates only circled the amount rather than including that as part of the prize itself. Candidates should be reminded that for this exercise it is important that the information they give is correctly spelled, and clearly presented.

Note Making - Paper 02 only

The performance represented an improvement on that in the equivalent task for previous sessions' exams.

For the first section the most usual answers seen were 'run frequently and on time' and 'carriages and trains kept clean'. If candidates did not get full marks here it was usually simply because they gave partial answers. For example, if the candidate wrote 'most develop' without adding 'in the world' then no mark could be awarded. Similarly, if the candidate put 'clean' without qualifying the answer, no mark could be awarded. Fortunately, such answers were rare. The second section caused few problems for the majority of candidates but the third section was a stronger discriminator. Few candidates got both marks because they just identified the two types of railway lines and few added the second idea that they were electrified. The final section was also challenging, and weaker candidates often put 'frequent trains' (which was an answer to an earlier section) or gave irrelevant information about the number of underground lines.

Part 3

Handwriting was an issue and it was often very hard to decipher meaning in some of the scripts. Some candidates found it hard to write to the required word length especially in the Core Paper, although candidates at the Extended Level also had problems with word length, especially in **Exercise 3**. Set against these criticisms, candidates seem much better prepared for this section of the Paper than in the past and are able to interpret the rubric requirements well, which was to their advantage. There were the standard difficulties with grammar, tenses, paragraphing and use of correct vocabulary, but in the main candidates produced some interesting and fairly accurate work in this section. Apart from in the work of the very weakest candidates, standards of spelling and punctuation are showing some signs of improvement too.

Exercise 1

This seemed to be a very enjoyable exercise for the majority of candidates, who all had something to contribute to the question of UFOs. There were some very imaginative accounts of the incident and many answers concentrated on a visual description of the UFO, candidates giving detailed information about its appearance, speed and trajectory. This was often after a brief preamble about the whereabouts of the candidate at the time of the sighting. Most answers saw the UFOs as friendly, although one or two wondered if their appearance was more sinister. Many candidates successfully used phrases such as, 'I was astonished/amazed' or 'I felt panic stricken', 'I was frightened', and 'no-one else saw it', 'nobody believed me'. Tone and register of a significant number of answers was excellent.

Exercise 2

Overall, candidates did not perform quite as well on this exercise. There was some confusion about the idea of 'being presented to' a celebrity: some candidates thought they were presenting the celebrity to the crowd. A few thought that Mrs Smith was the celebrity and a few did not give a name but wrote a kind of generic description and plea. However, there were some very strong and powerful pleas and arguments put forward including convincing detail about being the most suitable choice because of good grades in school, good behaviour, ability to speak in English and an encyclopaedic knowledge of the celebrity. Tone and register were generally pleasing, and paragraphing was often handled well.

Exercise 3

Most candidates were able to express an opinion here and the more able put forward convincing arguments either for or against without too much reliance on the prompts. Where candidates realised that the audience was composed of their peers, tone and register were good, once again. There were some very animated explanations usually in support of the idea. Less able candidates still used the prompts to put their views and opinions and were usually able to write fairly persuasively even if they made language errors.

Paper 0510/03

Listening

General comments

Examiners were pleased by a generally good level of aural comprehension displayed in these Papers.

Relatively few cases were reported of omission of questions this session.

Many candidates on the Core Paper experienced difficulty with numbers; sometimes they were more successful in writing numbers as words rather than digits.

There were signs of some candidates having taken examinations in significantly large groups and possibly being unable to hear the tape clearly from the back of a large echoing assembly hall. Centres must ensure that no more than 30 candidates share one tape in any one room and that there are appropriate acoustic conditions.

Presentation of answers was mainly clear, but there were a few cases where Examiners found difficulty in reading an answer or indeed ascertaining which answer they were to mark.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Generally this section was well done by most candidates and demonstrated a good level of understanding and engagement with the vocabulary and subject matter presented.

Question 1

This was generally well answered. Some candidates wrote “eggs and milk” instead of the required “eggs and chocolate”.

Question 2

This was generally well answered. Some candidates substituted dollars for pounds and failed to score.

Question 3

Candidates found the concept of “thunder” difficult in response to this question, although most were able to write “wind” for the rest of the answer correctly.

Question 4

This was nearly always correct – 9c. Some candidates wrote about “11b” and failed to score.

Question 5

This proved accessible, with most able to write about following the arrow.

Question 6

Some candidates did not answer “what does he want to do about his books” and wrote “He hasn’t finished”, a response to “why” not “what”. The correct answers were “keep them longer” and “19th December” – the date generally being well answered. More classroom work on “why”, “what”, “where”, and “how” should improve this situation in future sessions.

Part 2

Generally, there was a pleasing engagement with subject matter and vocabulary heard.

Question 7

Here candidates often muddled “extension” with “extinction”. which could not be credited. The human threats were “hunting” which was well answered and “destruction of habitat” where many candidates wrote “distraction” thus changing the meaning of the answer. The Asia answers in response to “Locations” were generally well done but many wrote “Africa” or “Siberia” as one option. Weight detail “300kg” was very well answered; but there were a few cases of “Km” for “Kg”. Hunting time -- “night” -- was nearly always correctly answered.

Question 8

The first answer “Top of North America” was well done, but the year which followed often led to wrong dates. The distance element highlighted some problems with expression of numbers, some candidates being unable to write “1,600km” in digits. “Greenland”, the next answer, was nearly always correct. The length of time was well answered too – “less than a month”. The reasons for the lack of ice was “climate changes” and “ice caps melting”. The purpose of the mission -“supply”- and the time -“27 months” - followed and were well done.

Part 3

There was much evidence of thought and re-working in these True/False sections.

Question 9

This exercise was generally well done. **(d)** and **(h)** (both false) caused the most problems.

Question 10

This was generally well done. Only **(b)** true, **(h)** false, and **(i)** false caused real problems for candidates.

Paper 0510/04

Listening

General comments

See Paper 0510/03 above.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1

Generally this section was well done by most candidates, who demonstrated a good level of understanding and engagement with the vocabulary and subject matter presented.

Question 1

This was nearly always correct – 9c. Just a few candidates wrote about “11b” and failed to score.

Question 2

This proved accessible, with most able to write about “following the arrow”.

Question 3

Some candidates did not answer “what does he want to do about his books” and wrote “He hasn’t finished”, a response to “why” not “what”. The correct answers were “keep them longer” and “19th December” – the date generally being well answered. Work on “why” “what” “where” and “how” will help this situation in future sessions.

Question 4

This needed the idea of “classical music” and “radio” to answer “what” and “where” in the question. Some candidates had difficulties here.

Question 5

This needed the answer “Petrol station”. Some candidates wrote “patrol station”, which could not be credited.

Question 6

This needed the idea of no money/film sold out/too much homework. Two correct answers scored one mark and all three scored the full two marks. Some candidates did not understand “sold out”, but generally this was accessible and quite well done.

Part 2

Question 7

The comments on this exercise in 0510/03 above, obtain here.

Regarding the additional tasks for the Extended Paper: the national parks question at the end of the form was tackled fairly well, but “October to April” was often written as “October and April”, which failed to score. For the “facilities” question some candidates wrote “train guides” or “accommodation” or “restaurants”, unfortunately.

Question 8

The comments on this exercise in 0510/03 above, obtain here.

The additional tasks in the exercise for the Extended candidates posed relatively few problems.

Part 3

Question 9

Generally responses here suggested interest and engagement with the vocabulary and subject matter presented on the tape.

Some candidates failed to write about “location” in question (a), the required answers concerning the French countryside, the start in the West, the anti-clockwise route and the finish in Paris.

For (b) most candidates understood that the area was mountainous.

(c) was generally well answered, with most candidates understanding the idea that the winner was the cyclist who finished in the lowest time.

For (d) most candidates were able to write that this was for the winner of the mountain stage.

(e) presented more problems in that some candidates thought team members sponsored the team leader. The required concepts here were keeping the leader to speed, sheltering him and giving him a drink.

(f) was less problematic for most. There were 1 million spectators, a world-wide TV coverage, many participants and much prize money. Any two of these reasons gained the mark.

Question 10

(a) was well answered with most candidates realising that the company was 211 years old, international and had 2,000 employees. Generally these numbers were well handled and correctly transcribed but a few candidates wrote “20112” for “211”.

(b) needed the answer about cameras which took photographs and were able to update information. Two pieces of information were required for the answer. Most candidates fared well on the examples of the navigation system and cited the idea of finding a lost child or an empty parking place or a cinema or locating the position of the car.

(d) just needed the answer “tourists” or “travellers” and was very well done. (e) was also well answered with most candidates able to provide two of how or where we live/shop/travel/work or study. The final question (f) concerned the factors for the speaker’s career choice; she liked geography, countries, people, and travel and any three of these scored the point. Many candidates reiterated the question here as one option “a vision of the use of geographical information for the future” and thus did not score.

<p>Paper 0510/05 Oral Communication</p>

General comments

- The overall standard of performance was comparable with previous years, but with fewer very weak candidates. As usual, the quality of language skills exhibited by the strongest candidates was very impressive indeed.
- Moderators were also impressed by the confidence and maturity of many candidates, who were able to join their Teachers in detailed discussion of complex and difficult subjects.
- Moderators reported that the accuracy of assessment continues to rise, with fewer and fewer Centres submitting marks that had to be adjusted at the moderation stage.
- There was also a welcome improvement in the conduct of the examination itself. The procedure set out in the Teacher’s Notes Booklet (which accompanies the oral test cards) is now being followed closely by the vast majority of Centres. This makes the task of moderation very much easier, and ensures fairness to candidates.

Comments on procedural matters

- It is very important that the recordings submitted for moderation are of good quality, so that voices can be heard clearly, and a fair judgement made by the Moderator of the linguistic skills of the candidates. Although most Centres submitted tapes that caused no problems at all, there were some tapes with heavy surface or external interference, which rendered voices nearly inaudible. A few blank tapes were also submitted. Careful checks should be made of recording quality before the moderation material is dispatched.
- It is important that samples submitted are of the correct size. It is also important that the whole of the range of marks awarded is represented in the sample.
- The warm-up conversation, although not assessed, is an important part of the examination process. It must *always* take place and be recorded. Even if candidates are well known to the Teacher and appear to be thoroughly relaxed, the warm-up conversation is always useful, if only as a means of enabling the Teacher to choose the most appropriate assessment card for a particular candidate.

The length of the warm-up is a matter for the Teacher. It need not adhere to a pre-determined pattern, but should be long enough to settle the candidate, but not so long that its purpose becomes lost in the general enjoyment of a ‘chat’. What is very important is that the tone should be set that can be followed in the assessed conversation. The candidates should be encouraged to join in a conversation, not merely to respond to questions.

- It is absolutely crucial if fairness is to be preserved, that the assessment card should be chosen by the Teacher – not the candidate – and that the two or three minute preparation time is the only sight the candidate has of the card before the assessment begins. Any departure from this procedure is unfair and threatens the validity of the assessment.
- When the assessed conversation begins, the Teacher should be aware at all times of the need to match the performance of the candidate with the criteria given in the three columns of the mark scheme. For this component, a temptation to make a ‘holistic’ assessment and *then* to allocate marks to the columns is likely to produce an inaccurate assessment.
- Since marks awarded by the Teacher are subject to external moderation, it is important that the candidate should not be given any hints as to the likely outcome of the examination. A remark intended kindly, ‘That was very good’, could easily be misinterpreted by an anxious candidate.
- External Moderators noted some errors in transcription and addition. It remains the responsibility of the Centre to ensure that all documentation is correct and checked.
- Notwithstanding the paragraphs above, Moderators report that many Centres make great efforts to ensure that moderation can be carried out swiftly and efficiently. Careful labelling of tapes, clear identification of candidates by name and number, and winding all tapes back before submission are some of the ways in which the external moderation process can be made easier.

Comments on the assessment cards

Judging by the widespread use of all the cards on this occasion, it appears that all were well received and provided material which enabled candidates to demonstrate their linguistic skills.

Card A

Reliable females

This topic proved quite popular with both boys and girls and produced some interesting and stimulating conversations. Boys were widely regarded as being unreliable at home, with a tendency to be lazy at school. However, a surprising number of candidates of both genders felt that males had a tendency to take life a little more light-heartedly and that this was a welcome antidote to exam nerves and stress in general.

Card B

Changes in lifestyle

Almost all candidates who were given this card had interesting family history to discuss. It was a pity, therefore, that there was a tendency in some Centres for Teachers to expect candidates to discuss this in a rather academic factual way. It is important that candidates are never made to feel that they are being examined on their depth of knowledge of a topic: this is not a test of *content* knowledge but of oral skills. This is why the assessment card notes emphasise that the conversation can be allowed to develop as the candidate and Teacher wish. It is usually much safer and more successful to encourage the candidate to speak about her/his own life than to demand or expect ‘external’ knowledge, which is not being assessed here in any case.

Card C

Why do wars happen

This card proved to be topical and controversial: and for that reason, maybe, was not used quite as much as the others. When conversations on this topic did develop, Moderators were surprised and impressed by the strong and well thought out opinions that were expressed. In some cases a sophisticated vocabulary helped to give full expression to the points being made, and most candidates were able to cope well with this demand.

Card D

Marriage

Moderators were impressed by the maturity of the responses to this card. It was obvious that candidates had thought carefully about the whole subject and were able to articulate their thoughts and feelings very clearly. There was a welcome absence of stereotypical teenage responses, and plenty of real conversation, often effectively and expertly stimulated by Teachers.

Card E

Happy times

Although this card was used widely, Moderators felt that the conversations it produced were often disappointing. For some reason candidates were often unable to look beyond their present situation to adulthood, and unable or unwilling to adjudicate in the matter of parent/teenager conflict.

Card F

Choose a topic

This card should be used only for candidates who are expected to demonstrate a high level of linguistic skill. The best advice is, if in doubt, do not use it. The fact that a candidate is entered for the Extended Papers is not a sufficient criterion for using this card. There is no requirement to use Card F in the Centre, however large the candidature.

If **Card F** is chosen, the requirement for the candidate to begin the assessment with a short presentation should be interpreted loosely. A candidate who dries up after less than a minute should not be left to suffer. Teacher intervention should occur as soon as it appears necessary and should not constitute a reason for reducing the mark that the linguistic skills would otherwise indicate.

Note: card F is being discontinued from the examination in 2004.

The assessment criteria

Structures

Although the assessed component should be a conversation and not a question-and-answer session, it is important that speech should be in sentences and should not become excessively informal. To apply the assessment criteria it must be possible for the Teacher to judge whether the candidate can achieve accuracy only when using simple structures or whether more complex structures can be handled successfully. When candidates are being prepared for this examination, they should be aware of this set of criteria.

Vocabulary

Many candidates have a very impressive vocabulary at their command and are able to use it appropriately. Once again, it is important that the relaxed and informal nature of the examination should not lead candidates to feel that they can relapse into a vocabulary which is appropriate among friends, but not when being examined in the English Language. To justify a mark in the highest band a candidate must be able to use appropriate vocabulary with some precision, and to sustain this precision throughout the conversation.

Fluency

This is the most difficult of the criteria to assess because there are a number of strands within it, which have to be reconciled. Pronunciation has to be such that the speaker can be readily understood. Centres should be reassured by the fact that External Moderators do *not* consider that British (nor, for that matter, any other world English) as a 'norm' to be emulated for the purposes of this exam, and they are used to assessing tapes in a whole variety of world Englishes; but what is important is that the candidates' pronunciation must not be so local as to render it incomprehensible in other parts of the world.

Another issue related to this criterion is speed of delivery. Some candidates speak much too rapidly, perhaps because they are nervous or feel that speed is an indication of confidence with the language. If the speed is such that communication is threatened, the top band of marks cannot be awarded. Likewise, a candidate who finds it necessary to pause between each phrase or sentence whilst the correct word or structure is located, cannot be placed in the highest band.

When deciding on a mark for this criterion, a balance has to be struck between the various components of the column.

Conclusion

Moderators report that the experience of 'meeting' on tape candidates from all over the world was an enriching one. They were again impressed by the obvious efforts of most candidates to do well and by the professional skill exhibited by Teachers.

Paper 0510/06

Coursework

General comments

Some candidates showed a very impressive level of maturity and confidence when faced with assessment in a variety of situations

The accuracy with which the criteria of assessment were applied was impressive. In no case was there a need for the Centre's marks to be adjusted.

Comments on procedural matters

Although most Centres submitted tapes that caused no audibility problems, in just a few cases communication was hampered by fading or by external noise. It would be of considerable assistance to external Moderators if careful checks are made of recording quality before the moderation material is dispatched.

Details of the size of sample required for Moderation are set out on the reverse side of the Candidate Summary Form. *It is important that samples submitted are of the correct size. It is also important that the whole of the range of marks awarded is represented in the sample.*

If Moderation is to be thorough and fair, it is very important that full details of the oral tasks, which are to be assessed are given on the appropriate form. Moderators need to know the nature of the situation to be assessed, details of any preparation which the candidate has undertaken, and any other information, which will be of assistance in the moderation process. It is not sufficient merely to provide a total mark for each candidate, when that mark is based on three separate assessments of a variety of activities and situations.

When assessment is taking place, the Teacher should be aware at all times of the need to match the performance of the candidate with the criteria given in the three columns of the mark scheme. On this exam, a temptation to make a 'holistic' assessment and *then* to allocate marks to the columns should be resisted since it is likely to produce inaccuracy.

Since marks awarded by the Teacher are subject to external Moderation, it is important that the candidate should not be given any hints as to the likely result. Whilst every encouragement should be given to candidates, nothing should be said that could be interpreted as a hint as to the likely mark to be awarded.

It remains the responsibility of the Centre to ensure that all Moderation documentation is correct and checked thoroughly before it is despatched. Unfortunately, inaccuracies in transcription and addition were detected in some cases this session.

The Coursework option of oral assessment is likely to generate a great deal of material. In particular, a large number of tapes are often sent for Moderation. Careful labelling of tapes, clear identification of candidates by name and number, winding all tapes back before submission are some of the ways in which the Moderation process can be made easier, and Centres are urged to keep this in mind.

The assessment criteria

Structures

Although most situations used for assessment are, by their nature, informal, it is important that speech should be in sentences and should not become unduly or inappropriately 'casual'. To apply the assessment criteria it must be possible for the Examiner to judge whether the candidate can achieve accuracy only when using simple structures or whether more complex structures can be handled successfully. When candidates are being prepared for this examination, they should be aware of this set of criteria.

Vocabulary

Many candidates have a very impressive vocabulary at their command and are able to use it appropriately. Once again, it is important that the relaxed and informal nature of the assessed situations should not lead candidates to feel that they can lapse into a vocabulary which is appropriate among friends, but not when being examined in the English Language. To justify a mark in the highest band a candidate must be able to use appropriate vocabulary with some precision, and to sustain this precision throughout the assessment.

Fluency

This is the most difficult of the criteria to assess because there are a number of strands within it, which have to be reconciled. Pronunciation has to be such that the speaker can be readily understood. Centres should be reassured by the fact that external Moderators do *not* consider that British (nor, for that matter, any other world English) as a 'norm' to be emulated for the purposes of this exam, and they are used to assessing tapes in a whole variety of world Englishes; but what is important is that the candidates' pronunciation must not be so local as to render it incomprehensible in other parts of the world.

Another issue related to this criterion is speed of delivery. Some candidates speak far too rapidly, perhaps because they are nervous or feel that speed is an indication of confidence with the language. If the speed is such that communication is threatened, the top band cannot be awarded. Likewise, a candidate who finds it necessary to pause between each phrase or sentence whilst the correct word or structure is located, cannot be placed in the highest band.

When deciding on a mark for this criterion, a balance has to be struck between the various components of the column.

Conclusion

The Coursework option for oral assessment provides Centres with the opportunity to be inventive and creative, matching situations to the particular needs and experiences of their candidates. So long as assessments are matched closely to the published assessment criteria, Centres should feel confident in exploring ways of making the oral course and its assessments interesting and stimulating to candidates. At times there is a tendency to 'play safe' in the situations chosen, which may not always be in the best interests of candidates.