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Urdu (8643/9643)

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Examiners' Report

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Unit 1 Listening and Writing

Candidates are required to listen to authentic target-language material and to retrieve and convey information given in the recorded material by responding to a range of mainly target-language questions, and by producing a guided summary in English requiring transfer of meaning from the target language. The questions elicit non-verbal responses, target language answers and two personal responses in Urdu of 30-40 words each.

Now in its sixth year, Unit 1 is not simply a listening comprehension paper as it also includes writing which accounts for 32% of the total marks.

Candidates' Responses

In general, the candidates' answers reflected a positive response to the Listening and Writing test. Quite a large number of centres had clearly prepared candidates well and most scripts reflected an appropriate level of competence and knowledge.

Extract 1

As last year, this comprised a simple question (based on childhood memories) requiring the candidates to tick a correct box from one of three statements. Most candidates demonstrated understanding of the spoken passage and selected the correct boxes from the four sets of statements. However, a small number failed to recognise the difference between the Urdu words for "fictitious, humorous and real characters"

Extract 2

Extract 2 was based on information about the usefulness of old and modern sewing machines.

The first part (2a) of the question required candidates to recognise the given statements as being "correct", "incorrect" or "not mentioned in the extract". Whilst several candidates scored well in this exercise, others had difficulty in identifying some of the key words (eg Urdu words for "important" and "button hole"). By and large, this part of the question produced high scores.

Part (b) comprised of fill in the blank questions. This section demanded not only the correct use of vocabulary but also an understanding of Urdu grammar. Only a small number of candidates managed to score full marks. These types of questions demand not only the selection of the correct Urdu word but also correct grammatical structure. Teachers are requested to pay attention to these individual weaknesses of their students.

Extract 3

Extract 3 was an interview with Jamila who came from Delhi (India) 20 years ago and how she finds the atmosphere of travelling by public transport in London nowadays as compared with earlier times.

This extract as last year had two exercises set on it with a total of 28 marks. The first exercise involving straightforward Urdu questions was generally well done. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. All irrelevant and superfluous information is disregarded unless it adversely affects the target information. Nevertheless, there was evidence of many weaker candidates attempting to transcribe the material without really understanding it.

For (a) most candidates gave a correct answer, although quite a large number failed to write the correct spelling of Delhi in Urdu. A variety of responses were accepted for (b) and most candidates scored well on this question. For (g) some candidates failed to pick the 2 differences between the roads in London and Delhi and understood "loneliness" and "quietness" as 2 different words. The blowing of horns (which is common in Delhi) was totally missed out by some candidates. Questions (d) and (h) although very clear, were misunderstood by a number of candidates resulting in overlapping answers and losing marks. For (y) nearly all candidates gave the right word (the weather) but some transcribed the whole sentence which was unnecessary.

The second exercise, requiring candidates to write personal responses arising from the listening extract produced a wide range of answers. For the first part, where they were asked if they agree or disagree with Jamila's views, quite a large number of candidates reproduced Jamila's view of her experience and could not give their own opinion. However, there were some excellent answers for this question and candidates scored full marks for language and content. The second part of this exercise asked candidates' opinion about listening to music while travelling in a bus or a train. As the question did not specify the country there was a mixed response to this question. Some gave a comparative view about listening to music between travelling in London and India, whilst others wrote their independent opinion in a general way. Again there was a mixture of poor and excellent answers.

Extract 4

Extract 4 was about a famous music director of Pakistan.

The rubric of this question clearly sets out the task of writing a summary in English of the listening text in no more than 60 words under the given headings.

Some very good summaries indicated that more and more teachers are clearly seeing the need to teach summary skills as part of the preparation for this exam.

Many candidates lost marks for writing longer than 60 words whilst others wrote unnecessary details about the music director's childhood and missed out on other bullet points. Some candidates translated the whole text into English and lost

valuable marks. Producing an English summary is an integral part of this Unit and teachers along with their students will need to work even harder to achieve good

results.

Unit 2 Reading and Writing

This year candidates displayed an improved performance over the previous year. Most candidates answered the various questions reasonably well and there were several outstanding performances. However some answers were of poor quality because of lack of knowledge.

Q1 was a fill-in-the-blanks exercise. The majority of candidates managed to attempt this question reasonably well.

Q2 had two parts: A and B. Most candidates scored full marks and demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the passage in part A.

In part B, the majority of candidates scored low marks because of poor reading ability.

Q3 was a very popular question and the majority of the candidates scored full marks and were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the passage. A very small number of candidates lost one or two marks due to limited vocabulary.

Q4 was again well attempted and the majority of the candidates answered this question correctly and scored full marks. A small number of candidates lost one or two marks in parts B and D of the question. Those who had a very good command of both English and Urdu completed this question to the highest standard.

Q5 was also very well attempted. The majority of candidates with good writing skills were able to score high marks but even less able candidates were able to manage reasonably good marks due to the help of the bullet points. A small number of candidates failed to understand this question and did not follow the instructions to use all the bullet points in developing their essays.

Advice and Guidance

Candidates need to be reminded that in order to score high marks they need to study the question paper properly and understand the instructions carefully before attempting to answer it. The examiners noted, however, that there were also some excellent candidates whose answers were full of good ideas, idiomatic language and appropriate vocabulary.

Units 3 and 4 Prepared Oral Topics

On the whole, candidates displayed an improved performance over the previous year. Most of the teacher examiners conducted their exams well, helping candidates feel at ease and contributing to a higher success rate. The recent improvements were partly due to the training sessions held by Edexcel which were attended by a majority of Teacher-Examiners. A significant improvement in performance was shown by candidates from both colleges and religious schools, with a much higher percentage achieving the top grades.

Nearly all of the chosen topics for Units 3 and 4 conformed to the specification and they were presented and discussed well.

Unit 3

Most candidates performed very well in this unit, demonstrating good knowledge and understanding on the chosen topic. Most candidates displayed evidence of thorough research. Problems reported were as follows:

- Recording in some centres was not sufficiently clear. In some cases examiners were too close to the microphone.
- Tapes were not clearly marked with the candidate's name and number in some centres.
- In some cases, discussions were too general with no evidence of research.
- In some cases, the introduction was too long.
- Some conversations lacked the unpredictable element.
- In some centres, the test was either too long or too short.
- Oral forms were not supplied by some centres, and some other centres used the wrong type of form.
- Some able candidates were prevented from displaying their full potential due to excessive participation from the Teacher-Examiners.

Unit 4

Overall performance was excellent. Candidates dealt with real issues and showed good debating skills. The quality of language was at a very high standard, with responses being spontaneous and appropriate. The majority of candidates demonstrated thorough and detailed knowledge while debating their issues. Reported problems were as follows:

- In some cases, the issues chosen by candidates were inappropriate in that they were not the sort of topics that could be debated. Conversely, some candidates chose good topics but weren't challenged by the Teacher-Examiner, turning the exchange into more of a discussion.
- In some cases, candidates were not able to achieve high marks as subsequent topics were not discussed by the Teacher-Examiner.
- Some Teacher-Examiners focused on the initial issue for too long, causing a loss of possible marks for the candidate.

Unit 5 Prescribed Topics & Texts

In this unit candidates are required to answer two questions in Urdu on prescribed topics and texts. The answers may be on either two topics or two texts or one topic and one text. Candidates cannot be rewarded for writing two answers on the same topic or text. Candidates are required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the culture and/or society of Urdu speaking countries or communities, and of the topics/text which represent them. They are also required to demonstrate the ability to organise and develop their ideas on the chosen topics/texts and to show the ability to write accurately and effectively in Urdu in response to attempted questions.

Assessment Principles

Candidates are assessed positively for their knowledge and understanding, organisation and development of ideas and quality of language. Up to 45 marks are awarded for each question using the grids given in the specification. Answers which are totally irrelevant or can be given no credit for content are awarded no marks for either organisation and development of ideas or quality of language.

Candidates' Responses

The overall performance of candidates was slightly better this year and there were many pleasing scripts with highly relevant and knowledgeable and to the point responses both on topics and texts. However a large number of candidates produced largely irrelevant answers with rambling organisation and patchy development of ideas. Many candidates were unable to respond well to the evaluation element of the question and show a degree of independent judgement. Some responses were so vague as to be of little value and in some cases questions were not simply understood and answered.

A fairly large member of candidates opted for topic-based questions believing these would be easy because of their sketchy knowledge of Urdu speaking countries and/or communities. Most of them wrote general essays without tackling the tasks mentioned in the question and lost valuable marks. Over and over again it has been emphasised that an initial assessment of candidates testing their ability to tackle the specific topic sets the scene for the teaching strategies, in terms of lesson planning. Furthermore, some topics are mainly suitable for mature or overseas candidates: it is inadvisable for a UK-born young candidate to attempt a question on 'The Emergence of Independence' or 'Poetry'. Even if a good teacher tries to prepare candidates for these topics, the candidates will never be able to gain and understand knowledge which is embedded in candidates who were born and grew up in India or Pakistan and learnt a lot from their family and environment. In general, answers to topics were not done as well as those on texts. Most candidates were unaware of the parameters of the specification and therefore could not answer the questions accordingly. They completely ignored the fact that questions on the topics need to be prepared in the same way as those on texts.

As in previous years, it was once again evident from a substantial number of centres, especially with large numbers of candidates, that teachers are still encouraging candidates to pre-learn answers for their chosen topic or text. It does not help candidates to produce identical answers. As well as other factors, they risk losing marks for their inability to analyse and substantiate points, give insight into the topic and text and exercise independent judgement.

Another worrying factor is that a number of mature candidates recently arriving from Pakistan are either not guided properly by their teachers or attend very few lessons and therefore have no understanding of the specification criteria. This year quite a large number of mature candidates opted to attempt Q4(b) and wrote nice essays on Immigrants in the UK and how teaching of Urdu should be promoted in the UK. They did not tackle the question at all which was asking candidates' opinion about the future of Urdu in Britain.

Advice and Guidance

Candidates are strongly advised to be trained in reading the questions carefully. They can benefit a lot from looking at past exam papers and analysing questions in terms of what is being asked: for example, is it divided into subsections; is there a need to evaluate or give opinions; or exercise independent judgement? Candidates should be encouraged to thoroughly read the assessment principles and mark grids for this unit as a good command of Urdu alone cannot guarantee a good grade in this unit.

Unit 6(a) Listening and Writing

It is pleasing to note that a large number of centres are becoming aware of the fact that the GCE Advanced level Unit 6(a) is part of a much wider Unit 6, which encompasses three skills; listening, reading and writing. It is also encouraging that many teachers have taken into account the modification in its mark grid ie, there are no extra marks for the quality of Urdu in question 1. In question 2, up to 15 marks are awarded for an English summary of the extract and 5 marks are allocated for English grammar . This realisation on the part of centres was reflected by a better performance in question 2 as compared to last year, with quite a large number of good summaries with average to good grammar.

The paper consists of two main questions together with their sub-questions on two listening extracts based on the same topic - Islamic Relief and the Edhi Foundation's charity work.

Qu.1

The first question was divided into seven sub questions. All the sub-questions (in the target language) were open-ended, requiring the candidates to extract information from the passage about the experience of Seema as a voluntary worker with the Islamic Relief Centre. The majority of candidates performed well in answering these questions. However there were some answers which included irrelevant information and in a few cases the candidates transcribed the relevant part of the recorded text in answer to these sub-questions.

In the past the attention of centres has been drawn to the fact that at GCE Advanced level, candidates are expected to have skills such as extracting and deducting facts and accepting or rejecting information.

Qu.2

The question asked candidates to summarise the extract in English in continuous prose, addressing the charity work of Abdul Sattar Edhi.

There were some very good summaries this year with average to good grammar. However, a substantial number of candidates failed to keep the content of their answer within the prescribed limit of 100 words in English and lost marks.

Unit 6 (b) Reading and writing

The overall performance of the candidates in this paper was very good. The paper was accessible to the majority of candidates. They were fully prepared and obviously spent time practising the essential techniques this year. However there was a small number of candidates did not do well in question 2 and simply copied the Urdu text from question 1.

Q1. This question carried 15 marks: 8 marks for comprehension and 7 marks for quality of language. Most candidates performed extremely well. Those who answered the question using their own words and scored full marks. Candidates who 'lifted' answers lost marks for language.

Q2. In this question candidates were required to render an English passage in Urdu. Marks were awarded only for the transfer of meaning. The majority of candidates answered this question successfully. Some candidates, however, could not understand the English passage. As the passage was on weddings, the majority of candidates scored full marks.

Unit 6(c) Writing in Registers

General Comments:

This year paper proved a good test at this level and produced a wide range of marks. Most candidates coped reasonably well with the various questions and there were several outstanding performances. However there were a number of poor efforts, which gave a clear indication that such candidates were out of their depth. Many candidates showed a great deal of linguistic ability in answering various questions. Indeed, their linguistic skill was almost beyond the scope of A-level candidates. They used an extensive vocabulary and a variety of sentence structures and the linguistic accuracy of a number of candidates was remarkable. As last year, the paper contained a wide range of questions giving both strong and weak candidates the opportunity to display their linguistic skills. The general standard of candidate's performance was similar to previous years.

In generally, the majority of candidates showed an improvement in their linguistic ability which was reflected both in their use of complex vocabulary and sentence structure as well as in greater linguistic accuracy. However, there was no shortage of poor scripts showing a lack of awareness of Urdu orthography. It is important that candidates try to write in what is traditionally known as "correct" Urdu but they should develop their own style as well.

Creative Writing:

The majority of candidates attempted this section with Question1 being the most popular choice. The overall response to this section was good. However, the linguistic accuracy of most candidates was limited. They showed a lot of regional influence, including inaccurate orthography and spellings. There was widespread examples of candidates using Hindi, English and Punjabi words to complete their sentences. As guided by the marking criteria, the examiners ignored some minor spelling and grammatical mistakes, but some mistakes were considered to be of a serious nature and candidates failed to access the higher ranges of the mark grids in those cases. Candidates need to be more aware of these failings.

Discursive essays:

This was the second most popular choice. Questions 8&9 appeared to be quite popular and they were attempted very successfully. However, for some candidates, writing an essay on a controversial issue appeared to be an uphill struggle, which resulted in low marks.

Most candidates were also uncertain about the recommended lengths of their chosen essay. Some essays were too short, but most were too long. Most essay topics in this section require a great deal of general knowledge and research. Few

essays showed any research or wider reading while most essays were generally descriptive in nature and lacked any significant amount of analysis or originality.

Task - Based Assignments

Many candidates chose this section and the majority of candidates, including those with moderate linguistic skills, managed to score good marks. However, those candidates whose English was not of a reasonable standard did not comprehend the task in English fully, and scored low marks despite a good command of Urdu.

Conclusion:

Question 1&2 were completed to a satisfactory level. Question 4&6 were answered reasonably well by most candidates. Most candidates scored good marks in question 8&9.

Candidates with a good level of English attempted section C as tasks were given in English and guidelines as to what to include in their response were provided for the candidates. In some cases, however, candidates' responses were written in a very cramped style, making it almost illegible for examiners to read with the naked eye. Some candidates included idioms in all their responses hence making no sense within the context.

Finally, it was pleasing to see almost the whole range of questions tackled and the hope is expressed that this will continue in the future.

Statistics GCE Urdu 2006

Unit 1 Listening and Writing

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	50	41	36	32	28	24
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 2 Reading and Writing

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	67	59	51	43	35
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

Unit 3 Prepared Oral Topic

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	45	39	34	29	24
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 4.1 Oral Discussion of Issues

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	60	48	42	36	30	25
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 5.1 Topics and Texts

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	90	58	51	44	37	31
Uniform boundary mark	90	72	63	54	45	36

Unit 6 Listening and Writing, Reading and Writing & Writing in Registers

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	100	81	73	65	57	49
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

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