GCSE

Chief Examiner's Report
Irish

Summer Series 2019

Foreword

This booklet outlines the performance of candidates in all aspects of this specification for the Summer 2019 series.

CCEA hopes that the Chief Examiner's and/or Principal Moderator's report(s) will be viewed as a helpful and constructive medium to further support teachers and the learning process.

This booklet forms part of the suite of support materials for the specification. Further materials are available from the specification's section on our website at www.ccea.org.uk.

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GCSE IRISH

Chief Examiner's Report

Subject Overview

This was the second year of offer for some of the skill areas; Reading and Writing, but the first year for the entire offer of the complete specification. In the majority of cases, it marks the end of the two-year GCSE journey with most candidates completing the course at this point. I wish this first cohort of the revised specification every success.

During the revision of the former specification to arrive at the current specification for GCSE Irish, it was held that candidates should have an experience that enables them to demonstrate their knowledge and develop confidence with the use of Irish across a range of skill areas. Furthermore, it was the intention that this specification would promote enhanced linguistic competency moving away from rote learning and towards providing candidates with a solid foundation in the language. The achievement of the cohort of 2019 leads me to believe that these objectives are being recognised by the candidature. I praise the work of teachers in interpreting the specification and the accompanying specimen material and for attendance at the support events to aid this period of transition.

Overall, candidates have had a positive experience and have achieved some fantastic results. Despite an increase in the available marks for Listening and Reading, resulting in a wider range of examinable vocabulary, candidates, for the most part, excelled in these areas. Although the rigours of the Speaking examination were considerable, candidates mainly had positive experiences and dealt with the variety of tasks well. In this regard, I praise the professionalism of the teachers who conducted the recordings.

It has been quite some time since a formal Writing examination existed at GCSE and for that reason a variety of approaches and successes were anticipated. Indeed, that was the case. For the majority, writing in Irish was well embraced and the only remaining challenge is in the accuracy of the written word. Further attention to spelling, use of the fada and verbal mutations will benefit future candidates.

Assessment Unit 1   Listening

Foundation Tier

This is the first year of the new specification Foundation Listening paper and overall, candidates coped well with the examination. The paper proved accessible to candidates and the majority of them responded positively to the questions and did not offend the rubrics. However, it was noted that the number of answers left blank this year was higher than in recent years.

The marks available for the paper have increased from forty marks to sixty marks and this is reflected in the range of vocabulary being tested. It is worth pointing out that the Core Vocabulary list, which is in the CCEA GCSE specification, is a very useful guide in assisting candidates to prepare for the Foundation Listening examination.

Section A

Q1   Generally answered well by most candidates but very few understood 'luchóg' in Part (b) and some gave 'Technology' as the answer for Part (d).

Q2   Most candidates scored full marks in this question.

Q3 Although this question was answered well, few candidates gained full marks in it. When candidates dropped marks, they were most likely to get the answers for 'Aoife' and 'Oisín' wrong.

Q4 Most candidates scored at least three out of the possible four marks available in this question.

Q5 This question was answered quite well. Some candidates ticked (i) in Part (b) presumably after hearing 'pictiúir'. Candidates are reminded of the importance of not only identifying key lexical items but also understanding them in context.

Q6 This question proved to be a good discriminator. 'Sparán' was not widely understood. Part (c) was challenging for many and Assistant Examiners reported that some candidates did not attempt to answer this part of the question.

Q7 This question was answered quite well, although some candidates lost marks for Parts (e) and (f). 'Cláraigh' and 'scairt' proved difficult for some candidates.

Q8 Most candidates selected the correct images in this question. However, many candidates mistakenly answered 'running' for Part (a) and very few got a mark for 'gardening'.

Section B

Q9 Most candidates got full marks in this question.

Q10 Most candidates got full marks for Part (a) but although Part (b) was more challenging for some, the majority of candidates gained both marks.

Q11 This question was very well answered.

Q12 Many candidates answered Part (a) (i) and (ii) the wrong way round. Most candidates also found Part (b) and (c) challenging and so only the most able candidates gained full marks.

Higher Tier

This is the first year of the new specification Higher Listening paper and the majority of candidates handled the examination well. In general, the paper successfully offered candidates the opportunity to perform to the level of their ability. This year candidates were required to answer questions in the Target Language and whilst this proved challenging for some candidates, others still accessed the highest marks and some excellent students achieved full marks. Assistant Examiners reported that there were sufficient challenges throughout the paper which allowed for differentiation, but that a number of questions were well answered by most candidates. It is pleasing that some of the last questions were still accessible to everyone, with all candidates picking up some marks in the later questions.

The fact that the marks available for the paper have increased from forty marks to sixty marks is reflected in the range of vocabulary being tested. It is worth pointing out that the Core Vocabulary list, which is in the CCEA GCSE specification, is a very useful guide in assisting candidates to prepare for the Listening examination.

The average mark on this Higher Tier paper rose by 6 which was very pleasing to see and would suggest that the candidates performed better in this new style paper.

Section A

Q1 This question was very successfully answered with the majority of candidates scoring full marks.

Q2 Parts (a), (b) and (c) were mostly answered correctly but a small number of candidates

selected a car instead of a motorbike for Part (c). The word 'seoladh' proved difficult for some candidates. The 'oíche' of 'meánoíche' may have been heard as 'ithe' by the candidates who opted for the picture of food in Part (e).

Q3 Generally the response to this challenging question was very pleasing. Most candidates handled the information very well. Some candidates lost the mark for Part (c) as they heard 'ceantar turasóireachta' and picked option (ii), ignoring 'not' in the statement. This highlights the need to avoid homing in on individual lexical items without taking into account the phrase or context.

Q4 Most candidates answered this question well but not many achieved full marks with part (c) proving to be the most difficult section.

Q5 This question proved to be a good discriminator. Parts (a) and (b) were well answered and in (c) 'less' was often identified but 'subjects' was not always with it. The last three parts of the question were difficult for a lot of candidates. 'Printíseacht' was only understood by the best candidates.

Q6 Most candidates achieved full marks in this question, however, some candidates were not familiar with the word 'casóg' and thought it was a pencil case.

Q7 Generally this question was well answered but 'agdéanamh garraídóireachta' proved tricky for some candidates.

Q8 This question allowed for differentiation between candidates. It was answered reasonably well by a majority of candidates, but some candidates struggled with it as they had to come up with their own answer. The second marks in Parts (b) and (c) for 'competition' and 'alone' stretched the candidates and were gained by the top candidates.

Section B

Q9 **(a)** This was a demanding question but Part (d) was reasonably well answered. Often there was confusion between 'leath' and 'dhá' in Part (a). Some candidates did not attempt to answer this question.

Q10 This question was answered very well by the majority of candidates.

Q11 Candidates responded well to this question with the majority achieving full marks. Part (b) proved difficult for some candidates.

Q12 This question did not pose many difficulties and was answered well.

Assessment Unit 2   Speaking

In general terms the Speaking Unit was well handled by candidates, although it was evident that the new format of the Speaking presented challenges to both candidates and teachers. Nervousness from both candidates and teachers was evident and Examiners were very aware of the stress which everyone felt. It must be said, however, that the same high standard to which we have become accustomed was still evident, particularly in the conversation element of the unit. The role-plays presented their own challenges but hopefully the following comments will help in the preparation and reassurance of candidates in the future.

Role-plays

From the onset it must be said that the role-plays were reasonably well handled, however a few issues did arise.

- The most successful candidates were those who gave the simplest answers.

- Teachers must not reword any of the role-play stimuli.

- It would be helpful to examiners if teachers would state clearly the Session and the role-play identification letter – e.g. Session B Role-Plays C and D.

Pre-Release Topic and Unprepared topic

Candidates were very well prepared for this element of the examination and many scored highly in this task.

Timing always causes difficulties and timing issues appeared at both ends of the scale:

- A few candidates produced very long orals, well in excess of 12 minutes, others were much too short- some lasting less than 5 minutes in total. There was also an imbalance between the pre-release topic and the unprepared topic in terms of timing with the unprepared topic sometimes being considerably shorter. A general rule of thumb for teachers and candidates would be 2 minutes for each of the role-plays and 4 minutes each for topics 1 and 2.

- Candidates generally found it easier when they were asked 'open' questions as this gave them the scope to use what they had learnt in order to showcase their language skills.

- Some candidates had learned large volumes of material but it was clear that they did not always understand what they were saying. On occasions, it would seem that the language involved was not commensurate with the candidates' ability and, as a result, this impacted on communication in terms of pronunciation and intonation.

- Candidates tended to perform similarly in both tasks with only a very slight difference in the standard of performance noted.

- Recordings were generally excellent, however, we did have a few issues with audibility - either because of poor recording equipment, misplacement of the microphone or excess noise coming from corridors or adjacent classrooms. Centres should be aware that it is imperative that they provide the appropriate equipment and examination conditions to allow candidates to perform to their full potential.

Those who scored the highest marks in the communication section were candidates who;

- showed clearly that they understood all the questions they were asked and responded readily, without hesitation

- extended their answers, gave considerable information (without turning their answer into a mini presentation)

- gave and justified their opinions readily and naturally

- spoke confidently and naturally

- demonstrated excellent pronunciation and intonation.

Those candidates who scored highest in the Use of Language section were those who;

- were accurate in their use of a variety of tenses

- displayed good management of irregular verbs in a variety of tenses

- were accurate in their use of prepositional pronouns

- used indirect speech with relative confidence and accuracy

- managed simple clauses with accuracy and confidence

- used natural language – appropriate connectives and introductory phrases.

Assessment Unit 3   Reading

Foundation Tier

Approximately 15% of candidates were entered for this tier in this first full series of the new specification for GCSE Irish. The overall performance in this paper was good. Assistant Examiners made the following comments on the performance of candidates in each individual question.

Section A

Q1 This question was well-handled and candidates were generally familiar with the vocabulary required though, surprisingly, some candidates were unfamiliar with 'brioscaí' or 'seacláide'.

Q2 Candidates dealt successfully with this question and understood the vocabulary required.

Q3 Candidates engaged well with this question and were able to accurately deduce the correct responses from the stimulus material, however, some confusion was evident in relation to 'Tíreolaíocht' and 'Mata' with candidates wrongly answering that the student's favourite subject was Mathematics.

Q4 Candidates found this question very accessible.

Q5 Candidates handled this question well but the vocabulary necessary for the answer relating to the specific month of the year escaped many candidates.

Q6 Candidates appeared to engage well with the new translation element of the Reading paper. Part (a) was well answered but some candidates appeared unfamiliar with 'oíche'. Responses to Part (b) and (d) were more mixed and many candidates did not know the meaning of 'pas' or 'bríste gairid'.

Part (e), which contained the genitive case of 'airgead' also proved challenging for some candidates.

Q7 This question was well-handled and candidates appeared familiar with the vocabulary required.

Q8 Whilst the language of this question was more complex, candidates managed reasonably well, with most of the candidature gaining at least one mark in each section.

Section B

This section was definitely more challenging for the candidates.

Q9 Candidates generally dealt with this question successfully and recognised most of the vocabulary required.

Q10 This question required close reading of the stimulus material and then the identification of the individual elements, which provide the correct answer to the questions in Irish. It was evident that some candidates did not understand the questions and this obviously affected the answers they gave. Rubrics in the Target Language proved challenging to many of the candidates. Most candidates found Question 10(b) very difficult – possibly the verb 'Cad é mar a mhothaíonn Éamann….?' was problematic. 'Fleá fhulachta' was also very challenging and unfamiliar vocabulary. Question 10(d) was challenging for many candidates, who wrote 'deas', 'ciúin' and 'cairdiúil', obviously not totally understanding 'comharsana' and the fact that 2 points were to be made. Candidates should be reminded that it is important to focus on and identify the correct response to answer each question accurately. They should not copy wholesale chunks of the text in the hope that they may stumble on the right answer.

Q11 There were many cases were applicants either got all questions correct or all questions incorrect. It was occasionally the case that if the candidate made an incorrect choice in the beginning, this had a domino effect on his/her performance for the rest of the answers in this question.

Q12 This question was poorly answered and it appeared that the vocabulary used in this question on social media was not familiar to the majority of the candidates despite this topic being an integral part of the GCSE Irish specification. The question required detailed reading and understanding of the stimulus material and then the pinpointing of the individual elements which provided the correct answer to the questions in Irish. Less able candidates found this a struggle and there was a significant number of questions not answered or answered incorrectly at this level.

Higher Tier

Approximately 85% of the candidature were entered for this tier in this first full series of the new specification for GCSE Irish. The overall performance in this paper was very good. Assistant Examiners made the following comments on the performance of candidates in each individual question.

Section A

Q1 This question was handled well and candidates were familiar with the vocabulary required, though 'iasc an lae' appeared to confuse some students.

Q2 Candidates found this question very accessible.

Q3 Candidates dealt well with this question, generally, having a solid knowledge of the vocabulary required with the exception of 'moill' being misinterpreted - 'Bhí moill ar an eitilt.' This led some candidates to choose option (i) overcrowded or (ii) cancelled in this case.

Q4 Candidates handled this question well but the vocabulary necessary for the answer relating to the specific month of the year escaped many candidates.

Q5 This question proved accessible to the majority of candidates.

Q6 This question was one of those which discriminated successfully between those with lower and higher levels of knowledge. The question required written answers in English and responses indicated that some of the vocabulary used in it was unfamiliar to candidates – 'príomhshráid, 'míle' and 'ag druidim'. 'Míle' was often described as a million as opposed to a thousand. Instead of giving succinct answers, candidates often provided additional and irrelevant information which, at times, rendered the original information they had given incorrect.

Q7 Candidates dealt with this question fairly well and were mainly familiar with the vocabulary required.

Q8 Candidates handled the new translation element of the paper well. A number of candidates, however, incorrectly pursued a romantic/wedding theme based on the translation of 'Lá Fhéile Vailintín'. In addition, some candidates translated the entire sentences or paragraph in each case as opposed to the words in bold. The term 'cur amú ama' was not well-recognised and was unfamiliar to a significant proportion of the candidature and it was clear many candidates didn't understand 'ar an lá seo' either. This question was a good discriminator between candidates.

Section B

Q9 This question was well-handled and candidates were familiar with the vocabulary required.

Q10 There were many cases where applicants either got all questions correct or all questions incorrect. It was occasionally the case that if the applicant made an incorrect choice at the beginning, it had a domino effect on his/her performance for the rest of the answers in this question.

Q11 This question was dealt with fairly well and candidates were familiar with the vocabulary required for the most part. Part (e) and (f) did prove challenging to some candidates, with a lack of knowledge in relation to 'feelings' vocabulary. This question was also one of those which discriminated successfully between those with lower and higher levels of knowledge as there was a good deal of reading and comprehension involved.

Q12 This question required close reading of the stimulus material and then the identification of the individual elements which provided the correct answer to the questions in Irish. This question proved difficult for the majority of candidates. Less able candidates found this a struggle and there was a significant number of questions not answered at this level. There was evidence that candidates did not understand what was being asked of them. Again, however, it was a good discriminatory question and this is where top candidates shone. A small number of candidates answered the questions correctly but in the wrong language. Part (c) and (e) proved most difficult to score full marks in. There was quite a large number of candidates who interpreted 'ag dul thart ar ghluaisrothair go mall san oíche' as antisocial behaviour. Candidates should be mindful not to copy wholesale chunks of the text in the hope that they may stumble on the right answer.

Assessment Unit 4 Writing

Foundation Tier

This is the second year that this particular paper has been offered with a larger candidature choosing to complete it compared to the small cohort of entry last year. The paper was accessible to all candidates with the majority engaging well with each question. Although the level of demand is less for Question 1 and Question 4, it must be noted that in order to avail of the maximum marks available, accuracy remains a key component. Spellings and grammatical accuracy are predominant considerations in the marking of this particular skill where leniency exists within other skill areas.

Q1 This was a very open-ended question allowing candidates to display their breadth of vocabulary. The nature of the question meant that most accurately written nouns were permissible providing that they made contextual sense. Misspellings and misapplication of the 'fada' formed part of the marking considerations for this question.

Q2 Candidates mainly dealt well with this question and used appropriate sentence structures to form their response. On occasion, where candidates had written too much information, it often gave rise to errors in both spelling and grammar. In a minority of instances, candidates opted not to answer questions or provided irrelevant information.

Q3 This question caused the most difficulty for candidates. The closed nature of the question resulted in inaccuracies in vocabulary and verb selection. That said, many candidates attempted each section with reasonable degrees of success. In many cases, candidates were able to select the correct verb and tense, leading to partial or full marks depending on the remaining vocabulary choices. Accuracy is key for this section and it is a case of practice makes perfect.

Q4 Candidates had a choice of three questions with the majority opting to go with Context 2 or Context 3. The expectation was an essay of approximately 80-100 words with five clear paragraphs, equally weighted, identifying each of the bullet points clearly. In addition, throughout the essay, there is an expectation that some opinion and justification be offered. The most successful candidates presented such essays and demonstrated a proficient command of the language. In those instances where candidates came up short, it was usually down to missing or incomplete bullet points, insufficient grammatical knowledge to construct logical sentences or insufficient vocabulary, leading to blank spaces or the inclusion of English. I urge candidates at this level of entry to practise short, simple sentences for which they can be awarded highly.

Higher Tier

Candidates engaged with this paper to a variety of degrees. For some, the opportunity to practise the written word was welcomed and they did so succinctly and with a high degree of success. For others, there was evidence to demonstrate difficulties around verbs, tenses and knowledge of sufficient vocabulary exist. As a skill which was previously examined by Controlled Assessment, it is important that candidates now focus on regular, short, accurate, writing tasks across the span of their GCSE Irish journey.

Q1 Candidates who used simple, concise Irish in these questions tended to score very highly. Those who used long, complex structures risked losing marks through inaccuracy. Furthermore, for full communication to occur, it was important that candidates selected a verb in a tense which correctly answered the question.

Q2   The majority of candidates demonstrated a high level of comfort with this question and, for that reason, they achieved highly. In the majority of cases, candidates noted that this question was predominately set in the past tense and therefore, the use of a variety of past tense verbs was required.

Q3   Translation is a challenging skill and, for that reason, candidate success varied on this question. From a marking viewpoint, it was important to observe a correctly selected verb in the correct tense. In addition, the necessary vocabulary also had to be accurate. In Question 3(a), for example, full marks could not be awarded for 'ólaim go leor uisce' as 'go leor' does not translate to mean a lot. That said, candidates did attempt this section with a high degree of accuracy, with Question 3(c) and (e) causing most difficulty. In Question 3(c), it was challenging to master the verb 'siúil', the preposition 'i' and the concept of 'abhaile' in one sentence. For Question 3(e), candidates approached the translation with a variety of structures, 'téim a luí', 'téim go dtí an leaba' etc but often omitted the words 'go luath'.

Q4   As with the Foundation paper, candidates were met with a choice between the three contexts. Distribution of responses was quite even. Again, the expectation was that an essay, containing 5 equal paragraphs addressing each of the individual bullet points and of approximately 130-150 words in length would be presented. Many candidates did lay out their work in this manner and differentiation of reponses occurred in the level of chosen vocabulary, the range and frequency of the opinion and justification offered and the ability to move successfully between the tenses as the bullet points dictated. For many candidates this last point became an issue when attempting to respond to bullet points 4 and 5.

Conclusion

Every effort has been made above to provide supportive and constructive feedback in relation to the performance of the 2019 cohort in order to help centres understand how marks have been awarded and to inform teaching and learning for the cohorts which will follow. The feedback is merely there to guide best practice and comes from a team of current or former teachers of Irish who hold the promotion of the language at their core.

The Senior Examining Team would also like to acknowledge that the associated pressures of guiding candidates through this specification to this point have been notable and we continue to use feedback to refine and shape our practice as we continue to progress through this specification. We thank you for your continued support and encourage you to avail of any and all resources on the CCEA website and to attend all subject specific events in the future to share professional dialogue.

In my recent capacity as Chief Examiner, I would like to thank the Senior examining team for their incredible support and professionalism through this time of transition. Furthermore, I thank all those who assist with the conduct and marking of examinations in any way. Without your input, the task would be impossible. I also pay gratitude to the team of CCEA staff who go above and beyond regularly. Finally, I thank the teachers and candidates for their hard work and preparation and I wish you every success for the future.

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