

November 2015 subject reports

English ab initio

Standard level

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-13	14-29	30-43	44-58	59-69	70-82	83-100

Standard level internal assessment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-7	8-11	12-15	16-18	19-21	22-25

The range and suitability of the work submitted

The majority of schools submitted recordings and visual stimuli which met all the requirements of the individual oral. The choice of visual stimuli was in almost all cases appropriate with most photos reflecting aspects of the target culture or at least not excluding it.

Most schools fulfilled the administrative requirements correctly and by the due date. Although all teachers submitted comments in English on the 2/AB form, some teachers recopied the criteria descriptors from the ab initio guide. Comments on the actual performance of the candidate (with examples) are more helpful to the examiner.

Some recordings were of poor quality, due to either the position of the microphone or to noise from students in the room or corridors. Teachers should choose a quiet room to record the individual orals and should check the quality of the recordings before uploading them on IBIS.

A few teachers have difficulty understanding the requirements of the task, specifically the length and content of each of the three parts of the oral and the teacher's role. If the process is not followed, the assessment of the candidates' work becomes difficult. How, for example, can an examiner give a mark for interaction (worth 15 marks) if the teacher does not ask a single question? How can the examiner judge the performance of the candidates in the presentation of the photo when the photos have been chosen by the candidate not the teacher and the presentation is pre-prepared?

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A

Many candidates show knowledge of a varied and extensive vocabulary. Basic grammatical structures are used correctly by the majority of candidates. In order to help strong candidates reach the higher mark bands for language, teachers should ask questions which allow them to use a variety of tenses and grammatical structures.

Many candidates have difficulty with pronunciation and intonation and in some cases the message is unclear as a result.

Criterion B

When the teacher respects the requirements of the 3 parts of the individual oral, the candidate has the opportunity to present and express his opinions on the photo, present and explain the topic of the written assignment and participate in a conversation on at least two general topics. When the teacher does not ask questions on the written assignment or on general topics, he/she prevents the candidate from achieving a high mark in this criterion.

The description of the photo and the questions on the elements and the topic of the photo constitute the greatest challenge for the candidates. The majority of candidates spoke clearly and with enthusiasm about the topic of their written assignment and answered the questions in the general conversation in some detail.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

The role of the teacher is essential to the success of the individual oral. The teacher must understand the content and required length of each of the 3 parts of the oral. He / she must choose the photos to reflect the topics on the programme and the target culture. He / she should also prepare a variety of questions for each part of the oral. These questions should include both straightforward and more challenging ones to support candidates of different abilities.

Teachers should introduce activities in the classroom which focus on improving pronunciation and intonation.

Teachers should use photos in class as a teaching tool to expand vocabulary and act as a stimulus to discussion.

Candidates should be taught how to refer to the parts of a photo (background, foreground...).

Standard level Written Assignment

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13-14	15-17	18-20

The range and suitability of the work submitted

Since schools are no longer required to submit a cover sheet for the written assignment, several schools uploaded the task without providing any information about the topic or the word length.

The written assignment should have a title which names the two countries to be compared and the precise topic of the cultural comparison. One of the countries must have a link to Anglophone culture. Candidates who compare countries neither of which are Anglophone score 0 marks in criteria A, B, C, D and E.

The most successful topics were both focused and clearly linked to the course content: Easter, breakfast, school canteen, uniform. Topics such as cancer or pregnancy are unsuitable since not linked to the ab initio programme. Topics such as lifestyle, coffee shops, internet, for example, are too general.

Most tasks met the requirements of the number of words (200-350) but those which were under the minimum number of words or close to the minimum number of words rarely provided enough information to reach the higher mark bands. Few candidates wrote more than 350 words.

Most candidates used the criteria headings as sub-headings to structure the task. However, many did not copy the questions under Reflection (parts C, D, E) and it was frequently difficult to associate the questions and the answers.

The choice of resources was occasionally unsuitable with some resources having little or nothing to do with the chosen topic. Some resources were linguistically too difficult for ab initio candidates.

Candidates who scored few marks did so because:

- they wrote a task which did not correspond to the required sections (Description, Comparison, Reflection). Some candidates wrote a general essay on a cultural topic.
- they had done little research on their chosen topic and consequently were able to provide little information
- the choice of the topic was inappropriate (too vague, too vast) and did not allow for a factual presentation under Description or an effective comparison.
- The responses to the section on Reflection (criteria C, D, E) were cursory and

- repetitive.
- the language was not clear and the message was consequently incomprehensible.

Candidate performance against each criterion

Criterion A: Description

There are still candidates who score no marks in this section because they do not provide at least 3 factual pieces of information about their chosen topic in the target culture. Those who score 0 or 1 mark do so because they write generalities about the topic, compare countries, or explain why they chose this topic.

Criterion B: Comparison

This section was generally well done and the majority of candidates provided detailed comparative information. Some candidates, however, who wrote extensively in this section, did so at the expense of detailed answers in Sections C, D and E. Few candidates used comparative expressions and linking words.

Criterion C, D, E: Reflection

A significant number of candidates did not seem to realize that the main part of the task, with its focus on intercultural awareness, is the Reflection, worth 9 marks.

Criterion C: question 1

Most candidates named one similarity or difference. Few, however, developed their answer. Many repeated information already given.

Criterion D: question 2

In this section, candidates must explain why differences or similarities exist between the two cultures. Candidates who continued to list similarities and differences scored few marks as did those who merely repeated information given in the preceding sections. Many gave superficial answers ("There are differences because they live in a different country / because they speak a different language.")

Criterion E: question 3

This question was frequently misunderstood by candidates who did not place themselves in the situation of an Anglophone looking at the candidate's culture. Many candidates repeated information already given.

Criterion F: Language

The level of linguistic competence was generally adequate to convey the message clearly, particularly in sections A and B where it is possible to base the answer on sources. Some candidates had difficulty, however, expressing their opinions in sections C, D and E.

Criterion G: formal requirements and register

- The register was almost always appropriate. On the other hand, many candidates lost marks for formal requirements. The documents to be uploaded with the task include a bibliography of all the resources and not the resources consulted in the target language only. Many tasks included neither resources nor bibliography. Bibliographies, when included, were frequently incomplete (the date of consultation of the internet sites was missing, for example...).

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Teachers should ensure that:

- The topic of the written assignment is clearly focused
- The topic is linked to one on the ab initio programme
- The candidate is comparing 2 countries, one of which represents Anglophone culture
- The candidates understand the requirements of each part of the task. They have the criteria
- The candidate uses sub-headings and has also recopied the questions (C, D, E)
- The resources are within the language abilities of the candidate
- The resources are relevant to the topic
- The bibliography is complete and coherent.

Standard level paper one

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-20	21-25	26-31	32-40

General comments

The results for this component of the examination range from 7 to 40 marks. All candidates completed the examination within the time limit. Most candidates were able to answer questions which tested global comprehension. Stronger candidates were able to identify specific information based on a close reading of the texts. Only the strongest candidates were able to deduce meaning from context. Text A proved, however, to be challenging for all candidates.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

The following comprehension activities proved difficult for candidates: fill in the blanks; match the beginnings and ends of sentences; identify true or false statements and provide a justification. In short answer questions some candidates had difficulty giving focused answers and tended to quote large sections of the text in the hope the answer was to be found there. It is for the candidate to identify the answer, not the examiner and lengthy answers are seldom awarded marks. Some candidates gave more than one answer to a question. Only the first answer is assessed by the examiner.

Handwriting is a challenge for many candidates and a challenge for the examiner to read. When the answer is not clear, no marks are awarded. Some candidates leave blanks when it is always preferable to attempt to answer the question.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

The majority of candidates seemed to have understood and successfully applied examination techniques. For example, many candidates showed that they had read carefully the instructions above each set of questions and gave answers which corresponded to the appropriate section of the text. Most candidates understood an adequate range of vocabulary linked to the topics of the ab initio programme and were able to identify key elements in a text.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

As in all examinations, there are questions which are intended to be easy, others to be of average difficulty and some to be difficult to allow the stronger candidates to show their language competency. The following questions proved difficult for some of the candidates.

Question 1 (general comprehension)

« What was the purpose of the expedition? » (Answer: to fundraise / fundraising / to collect money for charity). Many candidates replied « to collect more money than their fundraising target. » which is incorrect.

Question 3 (true / false statement with justification)

The statement « the journey lasted a month » proved challenging, as many candidates confused the verb « to last » and the adjective « last ». The answer given by many: « They went on a journey last month » says when they went, but not for how long. (Answer: false, in just nine days).

Question 6 (true / false statement with justification)

Some candidates did not identify or understand the meaning of the word « without » in the sentence « without a single bike breaking down ». « A single bike breaking down » suggests that one did, and is, consequently, an incorrect answer.

Question 8 (vocabulary matching: answer A)

This question which tests the meaning of « tough » is challenging and beyond the ab initio syllabus. The meaning is to be deduced from the context and the question tests the abilities of the stronger candidates.

Question 10 (short answer)

Surprisingly, the meaning of « weather » was unknown to many candidates who copied large sections of the text in the hope of providing an answer. (Answer: rain and wind) Candidates who gave several answers did not receive a mark.

Questions 11 -13 (fill in the blank)

This activity which tests vocabulary in context (answers: internationally, plumes, support) challenged many candidates. Several candidates did not realise that each blank corresponded to a single word.

Question 19 (short answer)

Some candidates did not take into account the word « first » in the question « What was Charlie Higson's first profession » (answer: comedian).

Questions 22-24 (to whom or to what do the following words refer),

Several candidates found this series of questions challenging. Although most candidates showed they understood the general sense of the sentences, they did not give precise answers. In question 22, for example, the correct answer is « the Enemy Series », not « the book ». In question 23, the answer is « monsters » not « zombies ». Likewise, question 24 is testing « characters » not « books ».

34 – 37 (fill in the blank)

This series of questions is challenging and questions 36 and 37 were only completed correctly by the strongest candidates (Answers: like and instead of).

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

Students should be advised to:

- give focused answers
- read the instructions carefully to understand what exactly is being asked

- use the order of the information in the text to find the answer or narrow down the possible answers
- read the questions attentively. When a question asks, for example, « Which word tells us... » the answer consists of a single word, not several.
- quote directly from the text rather than use their own words
- write clearly.

In class teachers should:

- practise with past examinations and the specimen papers (2013)
- include vocabulary building activities regularly in classroom activities
- focus on specific comprehension activities which candidates find challenging : to whom or to what does the word X refer ; true / false statements with justification ; matching beginnings and ends of sentences ; fill in the blank (testing both linking words and general vocabulary linked to ab initio topics).

Standard level paper two

Component grade boundaries

Grade:	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Mark range:	0-4	5-9	10-13	14-16	17-18	19-21	22-25

General comments

The overall results in Paper 2 are very satisfactory. The majority of candidates understand the requirements for the tasks in each section and are able, despite grammatical slips and errors, to convey an appropriate if basic message.

The areas of the programme and examination which appeared difficult for the candidates

Criterion A, Language

Some candidates chose questions which they had only partially understood. Others struggled to find the words to express their ideas on their chosen topics. Some resorted to using their first language. A more judicious choice of question is necessary. First language interference was also evident in the all too many adjective - noun agreements and the absence of subjects in front of verbs.

The form and usage of verbs challenged some candidates. The present simple and present continuous tenses and the past and present tenses were frequently confused both in form and

usage. Candidates had difficulty using personal pronouns and possessive adjectives. This made the message inappropriate for the context or ambiguous.

Criterion B, Message

Most candidates understood the topic and provided some relevant information. However, in order to reach the upper mark bands, the following points should be noted:

- Marks are not awarded if the candidate simply recopies part of the question to provide the information required by the task. While candidates may use words and expressions from the question / title in their text to establish a context, for example, marks are only awarded for the development of these ideas
- A task of less than the minimum number of words or of just the minimum number of words is unlikely to score highly for message. All ideas must be well developed to reach the highest mark band
- It is never suitable to copy out work used in the written assignment. Unlike the written assignment, the tasks in Paper 2 require a context, a text type and a target audience.
- Handwriting remains problematic. This component is electronically marked and poor handwriting on a computer screen can make comprehension difficult. Pens should produce clear black lines, not « soft » outlines
- Linking words are seldom used and when present are often used incorrectly. These links help structure the text and give coherency to the message.

The areas of the programme and examination in which candidates appeared well prepared

Sentence structure and paragraphing were generally well handled. Most candidates identified and provided each of the 5 pieces of information required in the task in section A. Most correctly identified the context in section B and provided most, if not all, of the required information. The strongest candidates developed their ideas by giving examples and a detailed description. Appropriate text type characteristics were used by most candidates.

The strengths and weaknesses of the candidates in the treatment of individual questions

Section A

The 2 tasks were chosen by equal numbers of candidates.

The language (grammatical accuracy and lexical knowledge appropriate to the topic) was generally adequate to convey the message clearly. When this was not the case, it was usually because of first language interference or because of the use of verb tenses which did not correspond to the context described in the task. All required details were successfully provided by the majority of candidates. Text type characteristics were also used appropriately by a majority of candidates.

Question 1

In a notice sentences are short and simple. Most candidates were able to convey the message about joining a book club clearly. Those who lost marks both in language and message frequently did so because they did not have the necessary vocabulary to express their ideas. Frequent confusions included: *meets / meetings; integrants / participants; actually / now*. A minority of candidates were unable to form verbs in the present simple and continuous.

The majority of candidates gave the information required by the task. The information which was the most frequently misunderstood or omitted was « how often the book club meets ». A minority of candidates did not provide one activity for the club and two other reasons for joining the club.

Most candidates recognized the text type – a notice - and received one mark for using a clearly visible title (for example: centered; underlined; in capitals; followed by a space). However, several titles were not adapted to the context of the task which was to encourage students to join a book club.

Question 2

The topic is school. Language was generally adequate for the task.

The majority of candidates understood the context of the task and the required content. The detail which caused difficulty was « what do you miss from the school you went to before? » Weaker candidates did not understand « subjects » and wrote an email about sports or school life in general.

The format of an email (subject; greetings; signature /name; date) was appropriately used by almost all candidates.

Section B Question 3

Fewer candidates chose this topic than topics 4 and 5. The text type is a presentation and the topic is « three things that happened in English-speaking countries this week ». The key words (*three* and *English speaking*) were not always identified by candidates. These three topics refer to specific events since they « happened this week. » In other words, information about festivals or families (information probably drawn from a written assignment) is inappropriate since it does not correspond to the required context.

The text type characteristics of a presentation were not always evident. A presentation requires an opening greeting, for example: *Good morning class, I am going to give a presentation on ...* and, at the end, a brief conclusion such as: *Thank you for listening.*

Question 4

This was the most popular question. Many candidates showed knowledge of a wide vocabulary range relevant to the topic (helping people affected by bad weather). They wrote an introduction to the article using the past tense to describe the weather and its consequences and gave precise examples of what to donate and of how to help people. Stronger candidates concluded with an appeal to the reader.

Some students did not understand the word « weather » and some wrote an article about poverty in general. Since one of the requirements of the task was to describe the situation, candidates had difficulty doing this adequately without referring to the weather. Candidates were also asked to explain what the people needed. It was not sufficient to quote the sentence from the question itself «These people need money, clothes, food and furniture. » as the only reference to this information. The information had to be developed by the candidate.

In general, candidates used the appropriate characteristics of an article: a title, a date, the name of the author, paragraphing.

Question 5

The candidates who chose this question structured the interview around the three pieces of information listed in the title (the sportsperson's career, advice to youth, hopes for the future).

The majority of candidates also wrote a short introduction to the interview in which they explained who was being interviewed. Weaker candidates did not provide the advice to youth interested in a career in sports. Most candidates followed a question and reply format while a minority wrote a text with the answers to the questions integrated in the text. Both approaches are possible although a question and answer format is possibly easier at this level.

Recommendations and guidance for the teaching of future candidates

- It is very unwise to choose a question in which the candidate does not understand every word: for example: « miss » (question 2), « subject » (question 2), « weather » (question 4) « advice » (Question 5). This can lead to significant loss of marks for the message
- Tasks in section B should be carefully analysed. How many examples are required? What are the key words of the task? Key words in the question should be identified by underlining or highlighting and checked at the end to ensure that no part of the question has been forgotten
- The logical development of a text is important: candidates should write in paragraphs and use linking words.
- Candidates must write clearly

- Candidates should have a copy of the criteria and understand what is meant by “developed ideas”.