



## Oral Component

### GENERAL COMMENTS

The pattern of performances in the 2004 Ukrainian oral examination was varied: there were several first-rate, polished performances of a high standard; a smaller number of quite good performances; very few that were merely satisfactory; and none that could be classed as poor. Overall, the quality of performances in the Conversation section was better than in the Discussion section. Almost without exception, students showed signs of diligent preparation. In some cases it was clear that the subject matter for the Discussion had been thoroughly researched, that suitable vocabulary had been sought out and learnt, and that students had thought deeply about their topics. The majority of students understood the need to demonstrate a range of communicative strategies. The level of command of Ukrainian grammar and the phonetic qualities of Ukrainian speech varied, but several students demonstrated a high degree of excellence in both.

An area of possible improvement for students at a good or satisfactory, rather than excellent, level of performance is that of listening skills. Some students, in attempting to react quickly to examiners, responded in ways that did not quite engage with the point that had been made. Others, enthusiastic to show what they knew, tried to turn the exchange into a monologue. Examiners found themselves having to interrupt these students to try to enter into a discussion with them. Finally, it should be pointed out that, while illustrative materials are sometimes useful for advancing an exchange between the student and the examiners, they should not be too elaborate. Students should not feel an obligation to speak about all the images, tables or artefacts that they might have brought into the examination room.

### SPECIFIC COMMENTS

#### Section 1 – Conversation

All students were able to maintain a satisfactory exchange with the examiners. Good preparation was in evidence on all of the standard topics. There was only one case when a student did not understand part of what the examiner had said, and gave an inappropriate response. The most accomplished students in this section displayed a superior capacity to link with the examiners, achieved an excellent balance between the formality expected in an examination situation and the familiarity that necessarily comes from a discussion of family and personal matters, displayed a variety of linguistic forms and a wealth of vocabulary, and were grammatically impeccable.

#### Section 2 – Discussion

The choice of topic for the detailed study was, in most cases, judicious, and allowed students to demonstrate their communicative competence at different levels of complexity. Most topics enabled adequate exchanges to be sustained between examiners and less accomplished students, while also allowing stronger students to demonstrate their command of specialised vocabulary and their capacity to express complex ideas precisely and economically. Although potentially difficult, topics addressing the role of literature and culture in the formation of national identity generated some superb interactions, including a comparative discussion of the innovative impact of Ivan Kotliarevsky, the first writer to employ vernacular Ukrainian for literary purposes, and Ruslana, the Ukrainian winner of the 2004 Eurovision contest. One student was able to initiate a lively and interesting discussion with examiners on the basis of a comparison of anthems and hymns. The status of the Ukrainian language in Ukraine, and the role of language issues in Ukrainian political and social life, also proved to be a suitable topic, yielding many opportunities to present both fact and opinion.

There was significant variation in the quality of content in the Discussion section. Some responses were very well informed, logically structured, and persuasive. A few, however, were not as well prepared as they might have been, with the result that students responded with uncertainty or in ways not quite relevant to some of the examiners' questions and comments.

In applying the revised marking scheme, examiners assessed students' performances under the rubrics of communication, content and language.

### Communication

When assessing students' capacity to maintain and advance the exchange, as well their clarity of expression, examiners were generally impressed by students' success in linking with their interlocutors. Students willingly answered questions, responded to examiners' initiatives in guiding the exchange to less obvious aspects of the topics, and in most



cases volunteered material suitable for developing the conversation. In one or two cases, the amount of information presented in responses was even excessive. Pronunciation was generally acceptable and, in some cases, very good. However, some students' pronunciation differed markedly from standard Ukrainian and was heavily influenced by their Australian accents. Speed and rhythm of delivery varied. The best performances were well paced, while weaker ones sometimes contained pauses. In all cases, however, communication proceeded successfully.

## **Content**

When assessing the relevance, breadth and depth of information, opinions and ideas, examiners were quite satisfied with all performances. Almost without exception, the information presented was relevant, and the range of information and ideas entirely appropriate to the set conversation topics. Of course, the more accomplished students distinguished themselves by showing a capacity to develop ideas and respond to less predictable conversational inputs.

## **Language**

Accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar were evaluated under the rubric of 'language'. Here, the broadest range of achievement was observed. Some students used near perfect language, with only one or two minor errors, while at the other end of the scale, there were consistent mistakes in case and verb endings. The average level of accomplishment, however, was good. No particular grammatical mistakes can be singled out as common to several students. All students used appropriate language registers and levels of politeness for a formal situation.

In the Discussion section of the examination, the attributes of good communicative practice were only slightly less in evidence than in the Conversation. Only in one or two cases did students need occasional assistance to maintain an effective exchange on their chosen topic. Where necessary, repair strategies, especially finding a paraphrase in the event of not knowing a suitable word or phrase, were used to good effect.

Finally, the quality of language (accuracy, range and appropriateness of vocabulary and grammar) in the Discussion section showed the same degree of variation from excellent to satisfactory as in the Conversation section.