

# Conducting the group discussion component

## Introduction

Component 2 of all ESOL Skills for Life examinations from Entry 2 to Level 2 takes the form of a group discussion. The group is made up of four candidates who have already taken Component 1, the one-to-one interview with the Trinity examiner, and takes place immediately after the fourth or final candidate has been interviewed. The normal group size will be four candidates but overall numbers per level may dictate that this number has to be adjusted for the final group discussion of a each level. The examiner works this out with the centre Representative at the beginning of the examination session and makes a final check on numbers before the start of the penultimate group discussion.

## Requirements

Facilitators must be members of the teaching staff at the centre where the examinations are conducted. They can be the class teachers of the candidates or teachers/tutors from other subject areas. They must NOT be non-teaching personnel. It is preferable, although not mandatory, for the same facilitator to take part in all the group discussion components at a particular level. They must be fully briefed as to their role and fully conversant with the instructions provided here.

## The role of the examiner

The examiner is responsible for the following aspects of the group discussion component:

- selecting the discussion topic
- informing the facilitator of the selected topic
- indicating the start of the discussion to the facilitator
- assessing each candidate according to the task-specific mark scheme
- indicating the end of the discussion to the facilitator
- completing all necessary assessment documentation for each candidate
- thanking the candidates.

## The role of the facilitator

As the name implies, the facilitator is there to facilitate the discussion and to ensure that the candidates provide the examiner with a suitable sample of language and communicative skills on which to make a fair and equal assessment for all participants. The brief for facilitators is to set up the task and then allow the candidates to begin and maintain the interaction. Facilitators should not join in the actual discussion but, if necessary, can direct comments or requests for opinions to candidates who are not participating to ensure equality of opportunity for making contributions to the discussion. However, it is up to the candidates to engage each other in the discussion and maintain the interaction.

It is the facilitator's responsibility to

1. provide the candidates with the discussion task selected by the examiner;
2. make sure all candidates fully understand the task;
3. ensure the discussion addresses the rubric and remains on target;
4. encourage participation from all candidates, preventing any one candidate from monopolising the discussion or from remaining silent;
5. end the discussion when given the signal by the examiner.

## Procedure for conducting the group discussion component

### Setting up the discussion

1. Immediately after the fourth or final one-to-one interview, the examiner asks the Centre Representative or Steward to assemble the candidates who will be participating in the discussion. The usual group size is 4 but at the end of the session, there may be a group of 2, 3 or 5 candidates.
2. When the candidates have been assembled in the examination room, the examiner gives the facilitator a written copy of the selected discussion topic. The examiner will have decided on a suitable topic after having conducted all the individual interviews.
3. The examiner will find a suitable place to sit in order to observe the candidates.
4. The candidates should be seated in an arc with the facilitator joining them in the arc but slightly outside of the formation. It is important that all candidates can easily make eye contact with each other and should not feel that the facilitator is seated as if directing the interaction.

### Facilitator's instructions

1. Ask the candidates to introduce themselves. This is especially important if the candidates are not known to one another but it also helps to remind the examiner who's who.
2. Read the discussion topic from the paper provided by the examiner. You should not deviate from the wording or give explanations, definitions or repetition unsolicited. Read the topic in a clear voice, in a natural rhythm without over-stressing key words and at a suitable pace for the level of the candidates i.e. neither too fast nor laboriously slow. If asked by a candidate for explanation or repetition, you may respond accordingly.
3. Ask the candidates to begin the discussion.
4. If all candidates have understood the topic correctly, there is no need to intervene. However, if it is clear that one or more candidates have misunderstood the topic or soon veer off at a tangent so that the original topic has been abandoned, intercede and remind the candidates what the point is that they should be discussing and explain if necessary. There is no point allowing candidates to discuss at length an unspecified topic as this will affect their assessment.
5. Leave the candidates to develop the discussion wherever possible. About half-way through, if any candidate has not participated satisfactorily in the interaction, direct a question or comment which will draw him or her into the discussion. Alternatively, prompt the others to ask this candidate about an aspect of the topic.
6. If the topic has been exhausted and there is still time to go, you will find one or two bullet points provided below the main theme. These are extra sub-themes to be used if the discussion grinds to a halt or starts to go round in circles; they are not obligatory so do not interrupt an otherwise successful discussion. If needed, use one of these to prompt the candidates to continue further.
7. On a signal from the examiner, thank the candidates and draw the discussion to a close.
8. Hand back the paper to the examiner and leave the room with the candidates.
9. Do **not** communicate the discussion topic to other candidates or other members of staff. The examination materials are totally confidential and facilitators, in taking on this role, are bound by Trinity's regulations of confidentiality.

### Quality control

Centres are required to provide information to Trinity of the staff members they may wish to use as facilitators. This should include details as to the facilitator's position within the centre. It is not Trinity's intention to vet prospective facilitators.

The facilitator's role is very important for ensuring the proper conduct of the group discussion component. Examiners are, therefore, asked to report to Trinity any behaviour on the part of the facilitator, which can be seen as disadvantaging or advantaging particular candidates or groups of candidates.