

Portuguese

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE J736**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) **GCSE J036 & J136**

Report on the Units

June 2010

J736/J036/J136/R/10

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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GCSE Portuguese J736/J036/J136

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Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first year in which the new specification was offered alongside the legacy 1923 specification. Only a few centres decided to enter their candidates for the new specification, but it was clear that a full range of performance was on display.

The new specification allows centres to enter their candidates for certification for either of two short courses in spoken language or in written language, and a small number of candidates were entered this year. The majority of candidates achieved a good standard in both options.

However, all but the highest ability candidates found some problems in coping with the new examinations. There were no past papers for which candidates could practise but the OCR website had made a set of specimen papers available. One of the main challenges reported by examiners was the fact that all question papers are written in English and, except in part of the Reading paper, many of the answers have to be written in English.

Examiners saw that many candidates had problems in expressing themselves in English (and sometimes in written Portuguese). Given that most candidates for Portuguese come from a Portuguese-speaking background their level of English has become an important factor.

In the Speaking and Writing papers this was less of an issue but there was still a potential problem if the candidates could not understand the tasks that were set in the Writing paper.

The lesson for teachers was clear, that candidates need to become acquainted with the new question paper formats. They should be made aware of the question types in Listening and Reading, particularly the rubrics and instructions. The format of each paper will not vary much from year to year.

A831 – Listening

This was the first year of the new specification and only a relatively small number of candidates entered for the examination.

Generally, the majority of candidates coped well with the new paper. However, examiners reported that very often candidates could not express themselves clearly in English. In addition, candidates frequently did not attempt some of the questions.

Exercise 1: Questions 1 - 5

As might be anticipated, this matching exercise of places in town was generally well answered by the majority of candidates.

Exercise 2: Question 6 – 12

Equally, this matching exercise was also generally well answered by candidates. However, in Question 9, a number of candidates incorrectly chose picture A as their answer.

Exercise 3: Questions 13 - 18

This sentence completion exercise in English was generally well answered. However, some candidates did not attempt to answer one or more of the questions. Some of the more commonly incorrect answers were found in Question 13 where answers included '*farm*' and '*camp*', in Question 15 where answers included '*camp*' and '*campsite*' and in Question 17 where answers included '*patinar*' and '*skiing*'.

Exercise 4: Questions 19 - 24

Few candidates coped well with this sentence completion exercise in English. In fact, examiners reported that many candidates did not attempt to answer one or more questions. For example, in Question 23, many candidates found this particularly difficult to answer with the word '*work*' being among the most commonly wrong answers.

Exercise 5: Questions 25 - 30

Many candidates coped well with most questions in this exercise, which required answers in English. However, examiners reported that a number of questions were left unanswered. For example, in Question 26, many candidates found it difficult to convey the idea of a '*unique experience*' and in Question 27, many candidates found it difficult to give two details, especially the second detail.

Exercise 6: Questions 31 - 36

In this exercise, most candidates coped well with this matching exercise of past tense activities and there was no pattern to wrong answers.

Exercise 7: Questions 37 - 40

In this exercise, which required candidates to write answers in English, examiners reported that problems arose from candidates being unable to express themselves clearly. It would appear that some candidates seemed not to have understood or been aware of the structure of the prompts given for the various opinions. This is an area in which candidates for future GCSE examination should give special attention.

Exercise 8: Questions 41 - 46

In this multiple choice exercise in English, the majority of candidates seemed to have understood the text they heard, but they frequently chose the wrong response. However, there was no pattern to the wrong answers.

A832 – Speaking

The first year of the new specification produced a range of candidate performance despite the relatively small entry for the examination.

The majority of candidates performed well and the Speaking tests were generally conducted efficiently. There were some outstanding examples of examining techniques that offered opportunities to candidates to fully display their skills. Open-ended questions are essential to enable candidates to communicate at a high level. Some teacher-examiners used mainly closed questions which tended to limit candidates' responses. Occasionally teacher-examiners spoke at great length, allowing the candidates very little time to develop the conversation.

The best candidates were confident, spontaneous, imaginative and enthusiastic. They consistently and accurately used a variety of clause types and responded fully to open-ended questions, offering and justifying individual ideas and points of view. Some conversations were very impressive and involved mature handling of topics.

Candidates who were well prepared for the tests understood what was expected of them and confidently produced high quality language and complex ideas and justifications. Those who seemed less prepared sometimes struggled to respond well and generally used straightforward structures and vocabulary despite being fluent. Teacher-examiners are reminded that it is their responsibility to offer candidates opportunities to express a variety of opinions and justifications, and to use a range of tenses.

Most of the Presentations were very good but a few teacher-examiners interrupted within the minute when the candidates were still presenting their topic. Some Presentation and Discussion sections were too long; the maximum time allowed is five minutes.

In accordance with the Teacher Instructions booklet, the choice of topics for the General Conversation was offered to some candidates and the candidates announced their chosen topic on the recording. Some teacher-examiners did not appear to have offered that choice. Others offered topics that did not follow the Random Order Sheet while some did not complete the mark sheets correctly and some candidates were examined on two topics in Part 2.

The majority of General Conversations adhered to the time limit. However, a few were very short, which disadvantaged candidates.

Most recordings were audible but some were of a poor quality, making them difficult to mark. Centres should check that tests have been recorded appropriately and take care not to write on the recorded side of the CD. Some CDs were not readable on Windows PCs. Each candidate's test should be saved individually as .mp3 files.

Most teacher-examiners had familiarised themselves with the Teacher Instructions. This is essential in order to encourage candidates to achieve their potential.

A833 – Reading

This is the first year of the new GCSE specification and a relatively small number of candidates took the examination.

As with the previous specification, centres should be discouraged from entering very young candidates, or entering candidates solely because they are of Portuguese-speaking origin, without giving them appropriate preparation for the examination as it is often difficult for the candidates to express themselves clearly in English. This is of particular relevance to the new specification which requires candidates to be able to read and write English.

Examiners reported that the less able candidates did not attempt to answer all of the questions but, generally, the paper was well received by the majority of candidates.

Exercise 1: Questions 1 - 5

As might be anticipated, this matching exercise was answered correctly by the majority of the candidates.

Exercise 2: Questions 6 - 12

Examiners reported that this exercise was equally well answered. However, in Question 8, a few candidates incorrectly chose the image for 'sandals' instead of the correct answer 'shoes'.

Exercise 3: Questions 13 - 18

Examiners reported that this exercise did not present many difficulties to the majority of candidates.

Exercise 4: Questions 19 - 24

Examiners reported that a number of candidates did not read the rubric carefully and wrote their answers outside the box instead of choosing the correct letter and writing it in the box. Rubric infringements could be detrimental to the candidates' answer and, therefore, candidates must be encouraged to follow carefully the instructions given in the question.

Exercise 5: Questions 25 - 30

Examiners reported that a number of candidates found this exercise challenging. However, most candidates coped well with Questions 28 and 30, although in Question 30, the word '*cooperação*' was often interpreted or translated as 'cooperative' or 'corporation'.

Exercise 6: Questions 31 - 36

The weaker candidates did not attempt this sentence completion exercise in English and it may be that they had difficulty comprehending the questions in English or writing their answers into English.

Exercise 7: Questions 37 - 43

As a more demanding exercise to stretch the more able candidates, these multiple-choice questions in English proved to be suitably challenging. Examiners reported that Question 39 proved to be the most demanding with many incorrect answers identified as either 'tourism' or 'architecture'. In addition, Question 40 proved equally challenging.

Exercise 8: Questions 44 – 49

As the last and most demanding exercise in the paper, candidates were required to complete sentences in Portuguese. This proved most challenging to the weaker candidates who had perhaps found the text difficult to understand and, therefore, struggled to answer the questions correctly.

A834 – Writing

The entry for this first year of the new specification was relatively small and so it is only possible to comment on scripts which, due to their low number, may not be typical of what we are likely to see in the future.

The most obvious point to make first is that a very large number of candidates chose to write on all five questions, instead of two questions as they are clearly instructed to do on the front cover of the examination paper.

It usually led to five fairly short pieces being produced, as just one hour was available, and consequently those candidates who were of average ability did not do themselves justice. None of the pieces were sufficiently developed to be rewarded with the highest marks available. The good candidates fared better as somehow they managed to write to a high standard in all five pieces within the time limit.

Poor handwriting is an increasing concern for examiners. It adds to the time needed to mark the work and is quite unnecessary, except for a handful of cases where the candidate is not capable of writing clearly. Time should not be a factor if the candidate is aware that only two pieces of work need to be written in one hour.

Another new feature of this specification is that, in the two pieces of writing, candidates should write for a different purpose in each one. Most candidates achieved this by making one piece a letter or email, (for example, in Question 3, making the piece an invitation to a friend) and the other one a more formal, less personal piece, in the form of a report.

A small number of candidates lost marks because they thought that the bullet points were questions to which they had to reply. Thus, they did not form full sentences and wrote, for example, to bullet point 5 of Question 4, '*A praia porque os miudos gostam brincar na areia ...*' In other words, they did not realise that they needed to write complete sentences and supply the beginning to this sentence.

A major change in this specification is that the bullet points serve as a guide to the candidates as to the type of ideas that they should develop. They are not prescriptive and can be ignored if the candidate so wishes.

This is not to say that the candidates can write on any matter they wish within the topic area specified. There will be, each year, one question set for each of the five topic areas but the candidates must respond to the task set. The difference compared to the 1923 legacy specification is that the candidates are free to develop their ideas on this task in any way they wish.

It is possible that many candidates will prefer to keep to the suggestions contained within the bullet points. However, it is strongly advised that they read the bullet points carefully because they will always show how to develop the points in such a way that maximum marks may be achieved. The fourth and fifth bullet points will encourage candidates to express ideas and opinions and develop them, sometimes, in a fairly abstract and speculative way.

An important feature of the new specification is that the mark scheme encourages the candidates to develop ideas, opinions and points of view. If these ideas are fully justified and explained, very high marks are obtainable. On the other hand if the piece is full of factual information with no ideas and points of view, then even if it is very detailed and carefully expressed, it cannot receive a very high mark.

Ideas and opinions have always been important in the GCSE papers but their importance has increased in the new specification. In general, it seemed that candidates were wise to this and many included plenty of opinions and points of view in their work, as well as explanations as to why they held their views.

Examiners were careful to reward ideas and points of view that were expressed in some detail. It is not enough for the candidates to give very basic opinions and justifications, on the lines of, *'gosto de futebol porque é interessante'*. Such language is too simplistic to achieve high marks for content.

It is important to note that the mark for Quality of Language has gained in importance. The weighting has changed compared to the legacy specification (1923/04) in that 60% of the total marks are now awarded to quality of language rather than the 50% in the legacy specification.

In order to reach the higher range of marks for Quality of Language the candidates have to use a wide range of structures. This includes use of verbs and formation of different tenses. Although there is no longer any requirement for candidates to refer to both the past and future in order to reach a grade C or higher, it is nevertheless still in their interest to do so in this paper.

Question 1: Home and Local Area

This appeared to be the most popular of the questions and it did seem to the examiners that our candidates are extremely helpful at home and, indeed, resentful of younger siblings who do not pull their weight in this regard. Whether this was merely fictional, one cannot tell of course.

All candidates were able to describe their home a little and then mention what they do to help their parents.

The better candidates were able to give opinions on why they feel they should help their parents to keep the house clean and why, indeed, it is important to keep a house clean. Some described how younger siblings do not help as much as they should and how helping out at home can lead to acquiring useful life skills.

Question 2: Health and Sport

Candidates sometimes wrote about sport but did not refer to an event. This could not achieve marks in the highest category. Although the piece was not irrelevant, it did not respond fully to the task.

One of the best responses was where the candidate wrote about an unusual sport which they particularly enjoyed and wanted to see developed in the country. They presumably picked up on the fifth bulleted suggestion and developed it into the subject matter of the whole piece.

Question 3: Leisure and Entertainment

This was a very popular question and many candidates wrote interestingly and well on a party that they had attended or were going to attend.

Many wrote in the form of an invitation to a future party, explaining all the activities that were going to happen. Opinions and explanations were achieved by saying why certain activities were preferred and by expressing how much they wanted the person receiving the invitation to attend.

Question 4: Travel and the wider world

There were a few candidates this year that wrote extremely well but wrote no more than a factual account of what they did on their holiday and gave very few opinions and points of view. Candidates should be able to report factual information in some detail but without the inclusion of ideas and points of view, fully explored, it will lead to a much lower mark than expected, no doubt, by the candidate.

The fourth and fifth bullet points gave candidates suggestions of how they could develop this aspect of the task.

Question 5: Education and Work

This question was generally answered really well and it is clear that candidates are aware of the importance of work and also the advantages and disadvantages of doing part-time work.

There was often a mature and sophisticated argument in the responses which gave much pleasure to the examiners.

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