

## **Examiners' Reports**

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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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## **CONTENTS**

**General Certificate of Secondary Education**

**Persian (J735)**

**General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)**

**Persian Spoken Language (J035)**

**General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)**

**Persian Written Language (J135)**

## **EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
A821 Listening	1
A822 Speaking	3
A823 Reading	5
A824 Writing	6

## A821 Listening

### General Comments

Most Candidates performed well. Their performance would improve further if they could be encouraged to:

- (a) familiarise themselves with the various Exercise types and rubrics used in the examination
- (b) follow the rubrics carefully
- (c) familiarise themselves with the various icons used in the examination paper, e.g. for such school subjects as 'history', 'chemistry', 'physics'
- (d) **Speakers of Dari (a Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan):**
- (e) familiarise themselves with the differences between their dialect and Persian as spoken in Iran. This mostly involves vocabulary, pronunciation and some grammatical structures
- (f) observe the word limits set for the various writing tasks (where applicable)
- (g) write legibly
- (h) use a style or register that is appropriate to what they have been asked to write. A colloquial style may be considered acceptable in a personal letter or email to a friend, but inappropriate in a formal piece of writing, such as an essay or a business letter.  
Inappropriate style loses marks
- (i) write answers in the allocated spaces, and within the page frame - i.e. avoid writing in the margins. This is particularly significant for online marking
- (j) pay particular attention to 'spelling', notably the significant role played by the following features in Persian script:
  - 'dots': the number and position of 'dots' in dot-bearing letters
  - 'dented' letters: the exact number of 'teeth' required for each letter, e.g. س (s) and ش (sh)
  - the second 'stroke' needed for the Persian letter گ (g) to distinguish it from ک

The above features are important because a 'violation' of the rules may create a different word with an entirely different meaning. Furthermore, this can be of special significance when answering multiple-choice questions by writing a Persian letter in the box/gap.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### Exercise 1

Questions were generally well answered.

#### Exercise 2

Questions were generally well answered. Question 6 played a differentiating role.

#### Exercise 3

Questions were generally well answered.

#### Exercise 4

Questions were generally well answered. Questions 19 and 21 differentiated the stronger candidates from those who needed further work.

#### Exercise 5

Questions were generally well answered. Questions 25, 26 and 30 played a differentiating role.

**Exercise 6**

Questions were generally well answered.

**Exercise 7**

Only the stronger candidates managed to obtain full marks for this exercise. Questions 39 and 41 differentiated the stronger candidates from those who needed further work.

**Exercise 8**

Only the very strong candidates obtained full marks for this exercise. Questions 43 and particularly 45 differentiated the stronger candidates from the rest.

# A822 Speaking

## General Comments

This was the first year of a full cohort for the speaking tests. The new tests consist of two parts:

- Part 1, comprises a one-minute presentation based on a topic chosen by the candidate and a follow-up conversation for about 4 minutes on the same topic between the candidate and teacher/examiner.
- Part 2 is a five-minute general conversation between the candidate and the teacher/examiner on selected topics.

In general, the tests were conducted well. This document highlights some of the key observations as reported by the principal and assistant examiners who assessed the recorded tests. It is hoped that these observations and the subsequent recommendations made by the principal examiner, will help to improve the future conduct of these tests.

## Part 1

### Presentation

The candidates talked about a topic of their choice for approximately one minute which formed the basis of a follow up conversation between the candidate and teacher/examiner. The presentations were mostly prepared during the preparation period and were delivered with timely accuracy and often in a formal and non-colloquial style.

A few centres used the innovative method of using holiday or family snapshots to prompt the candidate to describe and speak about the picture.

Some presentations were short and performed briskly. Candidates need to be briefed in detail before the test on the length of time they need to take to present their talk and also on the speed of delivery.

Some presentations had been memorised well in advance of the test. Here again the emphasis is not on the ability of the candidates to memorise a text accurately and redeliver it in the form of a speech but in their skills in speaking freely. While candidates are expected to have prepared and committed to memory the general structure of the presentation, they should avoid replaying a word-by-word copy of a certain text as their presentation.

The teacher/examiner should refrain from interjecting while the candidate is presenting the talk as it may disrupt the candidate's chain of thought.

### Follow up conversation

In general, candidates were comfortable talking about the topic they had presented. Often they took the lead and spoke almost without encouragement from the teacher/examiner.

There were, however, instances when the candidate had not much more to deliver than the key points already covered in the talk. The teacher/examiner needs to notify the candidate of the need to expand on the issues they may have covered in their presentation.

The teacher/examiners, on the other hand, should avoid conducting the conversation in the style of a questions and answers particularly when the question requires a brief answer with no opportunity for the candidate to build a sentence.

## **Part 2**

### **General conversation**

This part of the speaking test requires the candidate to speak freely on a topic. The candidate then responds appropriately to the teacher/examiner's questions and expands on the topic.

Here, most candidates found an opportunity to demonstrate a range of conversational skills that they may have not been able to use in the first part of the test. The conversations were mostly informal and colloquial terms were frequently used.

Teacher/examiners often used the suggested list of questions at the end of the teacher's pack as a means of encouraging candidates to speak. It must be remembered that this list is generally a list of suggested questions and is best used as a guide for the conducting teacher. The aim of the teacher/examiner must be to provide the candidate with ample opportunities to speak as freely and as expansively as possible. Interviews and Question and Answer style conversations should be avoided.

Candidates were often confident in their speaking ability and performed this part with relative ease.

### **Recommendations**

The key to successfully conducting speaking tests is preparation. Both candidates and teachers/examiners should familiarise themselves with requirements of the test. Candidates should be given the opportunity to speak as extensively as possible.

Equally important is the need for the test to be conducted appropriately. Asking personal and irrelevant questions or closed questions should be avoided.

## A823 Reading

### General Comments

This was the first year of a full cohort for this unit. The paper performed well and was accessible. The overwhelming majority of candidates seemed to have sufficient knowledge of Persian, with various degrees of familiarity with the examination format.

#### **Exercise 1: Questions 1-5**

A straightforward set of questions, which were well answered.

#### **Exercise 2: Questions 6-12**

Questions and rubrics were well understood. However, it is worth mentioning that the answers for these questions must be placed in the boxes provided.

#### **Exercise 3: Questions 13-18**

All questions in this exercise were clear and well understood.

#### **Exercise 4: Questions 19-24**

Although this exercise has a new format which differs to those of the legacy exercises, candidates performed very well.

#### **Exercise 5: Questions 25-30**

Candidates generally understood the questions in this exercise and answered them well.

#### **Exercise 6: Questions 31-36**

Candidates' attention should be drawn to the fact that possible answers to the questions in this exercise are all listed for them. Answers not included in the list were not accepted.

#### **Exercise 7: Questions 37-43**

Candidates need to be advised to read the text carefully before attempting to answer these questions. Answers based on the candidates' general knowledge are not given marks.

#### **Exercise 8: Questions 44-48**

As stated in bold capital letters, candidates need to answer the questions in this exercise in Persian. Correct answers in English will not be given marks. Candidates also need to be reminded that, at this stage in the paper, the answers need to be precise.

## A824 Writing

### General Comments

The writing paper for the new specification was taken for the first time on a large scale this year. The candidates generally performed well. However, the new assessment criteria need to be better understood and applied by candidates.

According to the new specification, the candidates need to approach the subject not merely factually and descriptively but also subjectively and analytically. The candidates' personal opinions and mention of different points of view and, in particular, the justification of these matters carry a lot of weight and hence marks in the writing paper.

Another aspect of the new specification which candidates need to bear in mind is that each question must be for a different purpose: e.g. blog/e-mail/letter/magazine article/ script of a conversation.

For instance, candidates cannot choose to write two pieces of writing in the form of a letter. They can write a letter and an email or a letter and a blog etc.

### Register

The use of appropriate register is important in the writing paper. The use of high register is normally required for written Persian unless it is to transcribe the script of a conversation, where the low register colloquial Persian is also acceptable.

### Illegible answers

The mere fact of hearing Persian does not equip the candidates with the facility for writing it. A significant proportion of the candidates write phonetically, which shows that they are simply using their oral knowledge of Persian and their limited knowledge of the alphabet, producing scripts which are very difficult to read and mark.

Some Afghan candidates seem to have Pashto as their mother tongue. The influence of their mother tongue, or of the country they have been educated in, is such that they often replace the Persian word with the Pashto or Urdu equivalent when short of vocabulary. In fact, poor spelling and handwriting, together with the use of foreign words, can produce illegible answers which are almost impossible to mark.

### Comments on Individual Questions

#### **Question 1 Home and Local Area**

**Your cousin from Mashad is coming to stay with you. Write telling him/her about yourself and your life in the UK**

This topic proved to be the most popular subject. The majority of the candidates, however, wrote a list of their daily activities, without much analysis of their lives in the UK, or even reference made to Mashhad, let alone attempts made to compare lives in the two countries.

#### **Question 2 Health and Sport**

**Write about a new sports and leisure centre in your area**

This topic also proved to be popular, although the emphasis was put on the sports aspect and the leisure aspect was mostly ignored.

### **Question 3 Leisure and Entertainment**

#### **Write about Nowruz (New Year) celebrations or a New Year's celebration of your choice**

This was a highly popular subject, and produced some of the best answers in the examination. The essays were, nonetheless, very descriptive, with few justifications if any. They comprised detailed description of the ceremony, rather than explanation (justification) of why the New Year was celebrated in that season of the year and the reason for its popularity over thousands of years in various countries, despite religious and cultural change and diversity.

### **Question 4 Travel and the Wider World**

#### **You are on holiday in Iran or another country of your choice. Write to your friend in the UK**

This topic was chosen by a number of candidates and included mostly a list of holiday activities and reference to hot weather. There was little mention of why this holiday and its activities were chosen and why it was enjoyable.

### **Question 5 Education and Work**

#### **Write about work, past, present and future.**

This subject was generally well tackled by the candidates who chose to do it. It was systematically and analytically approached.

## **General Recommendations**

Candidates generally would benefit from:

- 1 knowing that the maximum number of words for each question is 150 and they will not be credited for writing more. In fact they could lose valuable marks by putting important information or justifications beyond this word count, as they may not be taken account of.
- 2 not attempting more than two options, as this is a waste of time. Not only it will not earn them any extra marks, in fact it will leave them with less time to produce good quality answers for the two answers required.
- 3 being aware that the Ezafeh at the end of words which indicates the genitive case, is usually not written; and if written is only indicated by a Kasreh (short vowel sound). It was mistakenly written as a final h at the end of a word, e.g. "درس فارسی" (Farsi lesson) was written as "درسه فارس"
- 4 learning the correct spelling of basic Persian verbs such as: doing- eating- sleeping- speaking and simple words such as dear, family, only, food, chicken, sister, Iran etc... which will make their answers more legible and improve the marks awarded for the quality of language.
- 5 remembering that dots are extremely important in the Persian alphabet. It is essential that candidates should be familiar with the number of dots each letter has, as they change considerably the sound value of the letters of the alphabet.
- 6 reading Persian texts before taking the examination, to improve their written communication skills and the quality of their language.
- 7 improving their handwriting, as it will make their scripts more legible and earn them higher marks.

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