

OCR Report to Centres

June 2012

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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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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Persian (J735)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

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A821 Listening

1 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 exam.
- (b) Follow the rubrics carefully.
- (c) Familiarise themselves with the various icons used in the exam paper, eg for such school subjects as 'history', 'chemistry', 'physics'.
- (d) **Speakers of Dari (a Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan):**

Familiarise themselves with the differences between their dialect and Persian as spoken in Iran. This mostly involves vocabulary, pronunciation and some grammatical structures.

- (e) Observe the word limits set for the various writing tasks (where applicable).
- (f) Write legibly.
- (g) Write answers in the allocated spaces, and within the page frame – ie avoid writing on the margins. This is particularly significant for on-line marking.
- (h) 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, eg س (s) and ش (sh).
 - The second 'stroke' needed for the Persian letter گ (g) to distinguish it from ک (k).
 - 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.

2 Comments on Individual Questions

Exercise 1

Questions were generally well answered.

Exercise 2

Questions were generally well answered.

Exercise 3

Questions were generally well answered. Questions 14 and 17 played a differentiating role.

Exercise 4

Questions were generally well answered. Question 22 differentiated the stronger candidates from those who needed to work further.

Exercise 5

Questions were generally well answered. Question 29 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 37(a) and 39 differentiated the stronger candidates from those who needed to work further.

Exercise 8

Only the very strong candidates obtained full marks for this Exercise. Questions 44 and particularly 45 differentiated the stronger candidates.

A822 Speaking

General Comments

This year candidates were found to be of significantly higher levels of speaking abilities in both parts of the speaking test though their performance in each part was largely dependent on the way the test was conducted by the teacher/examiner.

The new style of speaking test that was introduced last year consists of two parts:

- Part 1, comprises a one minute presentation based on a chosen topic by the candidate and a follow up conversation for about 4 minutes, on the same topic between the candidate and the 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 fairly satisfactorily and there were no major issues. This document gives recommendations that will help to improve the future taking and conduct of these tests.

Part 1

Presentation

Candidates talked about a topic of their choice for about one minute which formed the basis of a follow up conversation with the 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.

Among the more popular topics of presentations were *Nourooz*, travels abroad, football, other sporting activities, 'school and friends' and 'home and family.'

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 delivering the talk.

A number of presentations were clearly 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 on their skills in speaking spontaneously. While candidates are expected to have prepared and committed to memory the general structure of the presentation, they are not supposed to replay a word by word copy of a certain text as their presentation.

Also the teacher/examiner is not supposed to interject while the candidate is presenting the talk as it may disrupt the chain of thought that the candidate is prepared to follow.

There were a few examples of the candidate reading off a prepared text. This is not an acceptable practice.

Follow up conversation

As before, candidates were largely comfortable about talking about the topic that they had already presented. Often they took the lead and spoke almost without encouragement from the teacher/examiner.

There were, however, many 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 and help them by asking open ended questions which would encourage the candidate to speak.

The point of great importance both in this part as well as in part two, is that teachers/examiners avoid conducting the questioning in the style of an interview. This pattern appears to be popular among less experienced examiners who are inquisitive about some of the more specific features of a candidate's topic but do not use general questions which would allow the candidate to focus on specific issues personally.

Part 2

General conversation

This part of the speaking test required the candidate to select a topic out of a number of three suggestions and respond to the questions, expand the topic and speak spontaneously on the issues related to the topic.

A sizeable number of candidates this year were not asked by the teacher/examiners the kind of questions that would allow them to use a wider variety of structures and tenses. The tenses used by the candidates, though very correctly, in most of the cases, were either disproportionately of the future or present or past tenses instead of being a well balanced mix of the three tenses or other tenses.

Teacher/examiners often used the suggested list of questions at the end of the teacher's pack as a means of encouraging the candidate 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. Any interview and Q and A style of conversation must be avoided.

Candidates were sometimes doubtful of how far they should continue with an answer and although they were confident of their speaking abilities and performed this part with relative ease, there were some instances of undue silence that needed the teacher's interjection.

Recommendations

Preparation is the keyword in this unit. Both the candidates and the teacher/examiners must make themselves fully familiar with the rules and requirements of the test. The most important factor in running a successful test is to make the candidate fully aware of the need to speak as extensively as possible. Short sentences and one or two word answers to a question may result in lower marks being awarded.

Candidates must be asked questions that allow them to express an opinion instead of just answering the question and be given the opportunity to justify their opinion.

Equally important is the style and accuracy of conducting the test by the teacher/examiner. Asking personal and irrelevant questions must be avoided at all cost. Teacher/examiners must remember this is not an interview but a speaking test.

A823 Reading

General Comments

This is the second year that candidates have sat this paper. They seem to find it quite accessible and no major problem has been identified in dealing with the different sections of the paper. The overwhelming majority of the candidates seem to have sufficient knowledge of Persian but with various degrees of familiarity with the exam format.

Exercise 1: Questions 1–5

Straight forward set of questions which were very well answered.

Exercise 2: Questions 6–12

Questions and rubrics were understood and questions well answered.

Exercise 3: Questions 13–18

Questions and rubrics well understood. However it is worth reminding candidates that they are expected to choose the answers from the list of words provided in the box. Similar words or phrases reflecting the same meaning are not accepted as correct answers and will result in their losing marks.

Exercise 4: Questions 19–24

Rubrics were well understood. No problems were identified in accessibility of this exercise.

Exercise 5: Questions 25–30

Candidates generally understood this exercise but they need to be reminded that the answers to the questions should be based on the text and text only. Common sense answers or those reflecting the candidate's opinion are not accepted.

Q 27: the answer to this question was "old people's home". The words "Khane Salmandan", which is a Persian translation of "old people's home", was not marked as correct as the rubrics clearly indicate that the answers to these questions must be in English (English words).

Q 30: The candidates need to be reminded that such questions as "How does Babak feel about the work and why?" require 2 answers (a)..... and (b).....

Exercise 6: Questions 31–36

Again, in the case of this exercise, the comments provided for exercise 3 apply. Once again, the attention of the candidate needs to be drawn to the fact that as indicated in the rubrics, all answers can be found among the words listed for them in the box. Answers not included in the list are not accepted.

Exercise 7: Questions 37–42

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.

Q. 39: candidates answering questions in this part of the paper are expected to differentiate between 'weather' and 'air'. Those who wrote "dirty weather" instead of "dirty air" as the answer to this question were not given a mark.

Exercise 8: Questions 43–48

Candidates also need to be reminded that at this stage in the paper, the answers need to be precise. Example: Q. 45 The answer to the question: "What happened 3000 years ago?" was that "Nowruz was celebrated in Iran for the first time" or "Nowruz became a national celebration in Iran". Information about other countries celebrating Nowruz was irrelevant here.

A824 Writing

General Comments

The candidates generally performed well in the writing paper this year. It seemed that the advice given to centres was well followed. The need to approach the subject not merely factually and descriptively but also subjectively and analytically, was well understood and applied. The candidates' personal opinions and the mentioning of different points of view and in particular the justifications of these matters which carries a lot of weight and hence mark in the writing paper, seemed to have been well grasped by the majority of the candidates.

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

For instance candidates cannot choose to write two essays in the form of a letter. Candidates 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 a script of 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 of writing it. A significant proportion of the candidates write phonetically, which shows that they are simply using their oral knowledge of the Persian and their limited knowledge of the alphabet, producing scripts which are very difficult to read and mark.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1 Home and Local Area **Write about your local leisure centre**

This topic proved to be one of the most popular. A number of candidates, however, wrote a list of their daily activities, rather than an analysis of why they performed those activities and what changes they would like to see in the leisure centre and why.

Question 2 Health and Sport **Write about your views on a healthy lifestyle**

This topic proved to be highly popular and very logically and analytically answered.

Question 3 Leisure and Entertainment **Write about Birthday Parties**

This was a popular subject, but some essays were very descriptive with few justifications. Some candidates made serious efforts to justify birthday celebrations and, as a whole, the essays were well written. Some candidates, however, gave detailed descriptions of the ceremony rather than explanations and justifications for the celebrations of the birthdays and the efforts and money spent on such occasions.

Question 4 Travel and the Wider World
Write about holiday travel

This topic was chosen by a number of candidates and included mostly a list of activities on holiday and references to hot weather. There was mention of why Iran or Afghanistan was chosen as a destination with a few opinions, points of view and opinions with simple justifications.

Question 5 Education and Work
Write about holiday jobs

This topic was generally well done by the candidates who chose to do it. It was systematically and analytically approached. The essays included many opinions and justifications.

General Recommendations

Candidates generally would benefit from:

- 1 knowing that the maximum number of words for each question is 150 words and that they will not be credited for writing more. In fact they could lose valuable marks for putting important information or justifications beyond this word count, as they may not be taken into account.
- 2 not attempting more than 2 options. If they do write more than two options, they do not gain any extra marks and they have less time to produce good quality answers.
- 3 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 answer more legible and improve the marks awarded for the quality of language.
- 4 being familiar with the number of dots each letter has, as they considerably change the sound value of the letters of the alphabet.
- 5 reading Persian texts before taking the exam, to improve their communication skills and the quality of their language.
- 6 improving their handwriting as it will make their scripts more legible and could earn them higher marks.

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