

OCR Report to Centres

June 2012

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It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

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.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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Unit A721 Listening

General Comments

This year, once again, candidates produced some very pleasing responses and we are grateful to centres for all their hard work in preparing their candidates. There remain very few cases of candidates who appeared to be entered for the wrong tier, which is encouraging and shows that centres are continuing to apply effective criteria in their own assessments and judging their candidates' abilities accurately.

In the current specification the vocabulary tested is either from the published vocabulary list or a cognate. Centres are reminded to ensure that candidates are aware of this requirement. They should also make candidates aware that some items of unfamiliar vocabulary (i.e. not listed in the vocabulary list) will appear throughout the Foundation and Higher Tier papers. At Foundation Tier candidates will not need to understand such items to answer successfully but at Higher Tier some unfamiliar vocabulary items will be tested in the exercises designed to test the highest grades.

Candidates generally wrote clearly, but in preparing their candidates centres should instruct them to cross out clearly any notes or discarded answers, lest they should accidentally invalidate otherwise creditable responses.

Candidates made very few mistakes in the interpretation of the rubrics and they had followed instructions well.

Foundation Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade G. All questions were answered well by candidates and the majority scored full marks.
- Ex 2** This exercise is targeted at Grade F. Most candidates answered without difficulty and scored full marks. Question 11(ii) caused the most difficulty for the weakest candidates where *revista* was not well known. Similarly *barato* caused difficulties for some in question 14.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade E. Most candidates continued answering well. Question 17 was answered correctly by almost all candidates having understood reference to the different languages, whilst Question 19 caused the most difficulty, the seasons of the year not being so well known.
- Ex 4** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. As intended, the level of difficulty rose slightly in this exercise and this produced differentiation. Questions 23 and 30 were well answered by the majority of candidates. Questions 25 caused the most difficulty, the noun *lluvia* possibly not being well known and the word *problemas* in the text leading many candidates to choose option B – 'transport problems'. Question 27 also presented difficulty indicating that parts of the body (*la mano rota*) were less familiar items of vocabulary for candidates at Grade D. There were indications that the need to deal with longer utterances challenged the weaker candidates, and this is a natural part of the design of this exercise.
- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade C. The exercise differentiated effectively at the top end of the demand on Foundation Tier candidates although questions 31 and 32 proved more challenging than 33 and 34. The need to understand a variety of contexts and to analyse

what is heard to reach the answer is part of the upward gradient of differentiation in the design of this paper.

Higher Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. It was generally well answered by Higher Tier candidates although, as in Foundation Tier, some candidates had difficulty with Question 3, the noun *lluvia* possibly not being well known and the word *problemas* in the text leading many candidates to choose option B – ‘transport problems’. However the majority of Higher Tier candidates scored highly on this first cross-over exercise.
- Ex2** This exercise is targeted at Grade C and it required candidates to understand a variety of contexts and to analyse what is heard to reach the answer. Higher Tier candidates performed consistently well on this exercise in comparison with Foundation Tier candidates whose performance was more variable. Question 10 caused slightly more difficulty as candidates were required to draw a conclusion from what they heard. Nevertheless the exercise worked well in achieving appropriate differentiation in both tiers. This is a further indication that centres had entered their candidates appropriately. There were very few indications of random guessing of answers in this exercise at Higher Tier and this second cross-over exercise differentiated well at the C grade boundary.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade B. The exercise type requires candidates to listen to Spanish and respond in written English by completing sentences. This exercise met its design criteria in differentiating very effectively between candidates operating at the limits of their abilities and those who were comfortably capable of more. Question 13(i) was well answered by most with *otros países* leading directly to the correct answer without the requirement for further interpretation. But the responses to question 15, requiring candidates to understand and manipulate two cognates (*psicólogo* and *habilidades*), caused the most difficulty. Centres are advised to teach transcription skills as a technique in dealing with exercises of this type. There was evidence that this had happened in some centres in the notes candidates were making and, in many cases, such notes led to correct answers.
- Ex 4** As is to be expected in an exercise targeted at Grade A, the material proved testing for all but the more competent candidates because of the requirement to draw conclusions from what was heard. Best answered was Question 17 – Luisa, which hinged on familiar vocabulary *novio* and ended with *modo positivo*. This question provided an accessible lead into the exercise. There was evidence of more random guess-work in this exercise than in earlier ones in the paper. There was no consistent pattern of wrong answers but, in preparing their candidates for this exercise, centres are advised to make them aware that they should expect a higher level of distraction in this exercise, so they should listen carefully not just for the correct answer but also to eliminate the remaining two options.
- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade A* and requires candidates to understand and interpret longer and more complex sequences of speech at a more natural speed of spoken Spanish. They need to recognise points of view, attitudes and emotions and to draw conclusions. All but the more able candidates found this testing, as was expected. To score a mark in Question 22, candidates needed to make it clear that energy would be saved all year round. This caused difficulties for some candidates who understood only winter or summer. In Question 24(ii) many were challenged by the requirement to render *década*, which is a near cognate. Question 26 effectively challenged all but the most able candidates, possibly because of the word order and the conceptual difficulty of understanding ‘research and development’ as a phase in production. Question 27, however, was generally quite well answered by many candidates.

Unit A722 Speaking

General Comments

The majority of centres had conducted clearly recorded tests and their candidates were easily identifiable. The marking criteria had been thoughtfully and fairly applied and, where necessary, internal moderation had taken place. Documentation and recordings were uploaded to the Repository or sent to the moderator promptly and any requests for further samples or corrections to clerical errors were acted upon in good time.

Moderators did encounter a number of problems, however and, in the interests of advising teachers of good practice and in an attempt to eliminate errors, the most common and most serious of these are listed here:

- failure to identify candidates at the beginning of recordings;
- omission of candidate details on CD labels;
- recordings of only some candidates in the sample uploaded to the Repository;
- incorrect documentation submitted / sent e.g. sheets for a different language;
- transposition of marks between Tasks 1 and 2;
- arithmetic errors in the totalling of marks for Tasks;
- inaccurate transfer of marks from GCW 932 forms (Working Mark Sheets) to MS1 forms;
- omission of CCS 160 form (Centre Authentication Form) from submission;
- GCW 937 forms (Student's Notes Forms) frequently not sent. Teachers are reminded that these are required for both Tasks for both Controlled Assessment units. If candidates have chosen not to use the Notes Forms, a signed, nil return is acceptable.
- the submission together of both the examined, Writing, unit and the moderated, Speaking, unit to the Speaking moderator;
- delays in the submission of materials, starting with the deadline of 15th May for receipt by both OCR and the moderator of the MS1 forms;
- some centres were very slow in responding to requests from moderators, e.g. when marks for Tasks 1 & 2 were transposed, one school failed to respond for two weeks;

Teachers are requested to check OCR instructions carefully as omissions can delay the moderators' task and the timely publication of results. The stipulations regarding the submission of work for A722 are contained in the document, Guide to Controlled Assessment in GCSE Modern Foreign Languages, on pages 60 and 61. The document can be accessed in the OCR website

Centres are reminded that use of the interactive version of the Working Mark Sheet [Form GCW 932] eliminates the possibility of arithmetic errors since the software produces the total mark. This is also available from the OCR website.

As was stated last year, the introduction of digital recordings has been a great improvement. As we continue to gain experience in this specification, we can report that we have found the mp3 format to be superior to any other; it results in fewer problems and requests for centres to resubmit recordings. We must reiterate our plea for teachers to eliminate or at least reduce extraneous noises, for example the shuffling of papers near sensitive microphones and the movement of pupils along adjoining corridors. Additionally, some recordings were faint and therefore difficult to hear. Please monitor sound levels and ensure that tests can be heard when played on other equipment.

Once again, most centres selected topics such as Self and Family, School, Work Experience, Holidays, Local Area or Free Time. These and other topics worked best when there was some variation of approach and differentiation according to ability level. The same standard task is

unlikely to elicit the best performance of the whole ability range. Similarly, the use of the same questions for each candidate will not necessarily allow a demonstration of individuality and personal expression and may raise the issue of the unpredictability of the questions offered.

The preferred task types were those of Presentation and Discussion; Conversation and Interview. Teachers are reminded that the tasks submitted must not be monologues and therefore a balance must be struck between the candidate being allowed to speak and the need for there to be interaction and exchanges between the teacher/examiner and the candidate. Some candidates' presentations were too long and did not allow sufficient time for a decent discussion to follow, thereby removing the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate ability in this area and to access the full range of marks. Similarly, some teachers allowed a sequence of 'mini-presentations' with very few questions put to the candidate, in effect giving the same result. Teachers are reminded of the points made earlier, that there should be evidence of some variety in questioning and some unpredictable questions, one example of which is questions which go beyond cuing the next area for exploration.

As general guidance, the Communication mark should be based on the information and ideas successfully conveyed by the candidate, it should also take into account any hesitancy and ambiguity and reflect how much the candidate elaborated on their answers and whether or not they needed questions repeated or rephrased. More able candidates can be given the opportunity to show their interactive skills by testing them with challenging questions which are designed to stretch them by seeking further detail, clarification and examples. They should be allowed to develop their ideas and to produce longer strings of communication. With those candidates not expected to achieve the highest marks, opinions and reasons can be sought in order to elicit a more personalised account.

Differentiation in terms of Quality of Language can be achieved by encouraging capable candidates to demonstrate their ability by incorporating more complex structures or more specialised vocabulary if the topic demands it, for example when exploring ideas on the environment. For all candidates, individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. For example, when speaking at a simple level about members of the family, the use of adjectives to describe character and physique can distinguish one candidate's test from that of his or her peers.

Teachers must be careful not to reward language which is mainly error-free but very simple with a high Quality of Language mark; this cannot be justified. The higher ranges of the marking criteria are for successful use of more ambitious structures and vocabulary. Although pronunciation tended to be fairly good in most centres, with marks of 4 and 3 commonly achieved, for some candidates poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, which impacted on their overall mark. In these cases there was much interference from English and vowels in particular were unclear.

Some centres appeared to view the pronunciation mark as being directly linked to the Quality of Language mark and, as a result, some weaker candidates with poor content were marked low despite the fact that their pronunciation was reasonably accurate.

Centres are reminded that they will receive a report on their submission, prepared by the moderator who assessed their speaking tests. Where appropriate, guidance may be given to assist teachers to elicit improved performances from their candidates and to access higher marks.

Unit A723 Reading

General Comments

Centres had prepared their candidates well for the paper which appeared to differentiate well between Higher and Foundation Tiers. The majority managed to complete the paper and there were very few who appeared to have been entered for the wrong tier, which shows that centres had judged their candidates' abilities accurately.

In the current specification the vocabulary tested is either from the published vocabulary list or a cognate. Centres are reminded to ensure that candidates are aware of this requirement. They should also make candidates aware that some items of unfamiliar vocabulary (i.e. not listed in the vocabulary list) will appear throughout the Foundation and Higher Tier papers. At Foundation Tier candidates will not need to understand such items in order to answer successfully but at Higher Tier, some unfamiliar vocabulary items will be tested but only in the exercises designed to test the highest grades.

Overall candidates made very few mistakes in the interpretation of the rubrics.

Foundation Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade G. This exercise was well done and the majority of candidates scored full marks.
- Ex 2** This exercise is targeted at Grade F. This was again well done with many candidates scoring full marks. In Question 12 *doy un paseo* was not well known by all. Question 13 caused the most difficulty as candidates did not recognise the expression *demasiada gente*.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade E. This exercise was again well answered and almost all candidates answered Question 23 correctly, *castillos* proving familiar territory. In Question 20 '*muchas horas de vuelo*' caused the most difficulty.
- Ex 4** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. This exercise differentiated well and produced a more mixed performance at Foundation Tier. Questions 25 and 26 were generally well answered but Question 27 slightly less so with 'swim' being the most common answer. In Question 28 the omission of 'training' caused most candidates not to score. Many misinterpreted *entrenando* as *entrando* giving 'entering a national competition' as their answer. In Question 29 few candidates understood *últimas* as 'latest', some rendering it as 'ultimate films' and others guessing 'best' or 'good' films. Question 30 was answered correctly by many candidates. Question 31 caused more difficulty with some understanding *estadio* as *estudio*. In Question 32 many thought that his 'friends' created the great atmosphere.
- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade C. This exercise was generally well answered at this level and most candidates scored marks in Questions 36, 37, 39 and 40. 'Mariana' and 'Beatriz' in Questions 34 and 35 were sometimes transposed.

Higher Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. Higher Tier candidates scored well in this exercise and almost all candidates answered Questions 1, 2 and 3 correctly. In Question 3 most candidates still referred to 'swimming' though some correctly interpreted '*hacer pesos*' while others correctly referred to 'training'. As in Foundation Tier the mention of 'training' was often omitted and many did not score as a result. 'Entering' a competition was again common. *Ultimas* was often unknown as 'latest' in Question 5 and most incorrect answers were 'best' or 'good' films. Question 6 was well answered. In question 8, while most candidates understood the idea of attending a match or the stadium, some went on to include the idea that they themselves were playing and that they were being cheered on by their friends. Some Higher Tier candidates also interpreted *estadio* as *estudio*. Better candidates correctly identified *cantamos* and understood that Daniel was 'singing' with his friends but some, perhaps guessing, wrote 'chanting', 'shouting' or 'cheering'.
- Ex 2** This exercise is targeted at Grade C. Candidates answered well and full marks were very common at Higher Tier.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade B. Most candidates scored well on this exercise.
- Ex 4** This exercise is targeted at Grade A. This exercise differentiated well and was a good test of how carefully candidates had read the text. In Question 25, for example *idiomas* and *intérprete* led many to choose response B and in question 27, *problemas con la globalización y el medio ambiente* led some to choose response C. In Question 32, *hay sitio para todos* was not always well understood. Questions 26, 28, 29, 30 and 31 were well answered.
- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade A*. Questions 33 and 35 were well answered. Despite the clues of *empresarios* and *un camino independiente*, Question 34 seemed to cause many candidates difficulty. In question 36, *jubilarte* caused some difficulty and in question 37, the link between *cobrar un sueldo* and response A was not always made. Question 39 was answered correctly by just over half of the candidates, although the construction in the stimulus text was quite straightforward. Question 40 was well answered, the cognate *reputación* being successfully linked to *más conocida*.

Unit A724 Writing

General Comments

In the second year of this specification, most candidates produced two pieces that conformed to the requirements set, notably for two different purposes and covering material from two different topic areas.

There was a variety of purposes attempted, such as a web blog, email, letter, diary entry, report, magazine article or competition entry. When setting their tasks, some centres took advantage of the greater freedom offered in this unit by setting their candidates a task designed to stretch and challenge. The most popular topic areas were school, holidays, work experience, local area and healthy lifestyle but there were also successful pieces that focused on a film review or environmental problems.

Once again, centres are reminded of the advisability of choosing an appropriate task for their candidates and differentiating where necessary. Most centres had chosen tasks which were appropriate to the level of their candidates, allowing some very effective pieces to be produced.

It is noticeable that many candidates within the same centre appear to be writing to a template, producing pieces which are very similar in content, even down to the same anecdotal stories. Centres are advised that the spirit of this specification is to allow the candidate the freedom to develop a task in their own individual way to produce a personal piece of writing and, in many cases, this is not happening. Candidates should be encouraged to produce an individual response to a task appropriate to their ability. The best pieces produced this year were those which showed originality and in which the candidate had taken an individual approach.

The choice of topic is also important as some tend to lead candidates to produce purely factual content, writing lists of vocabulary (school subjects or rooms in the house), rather than offering and developing their thoughts and opinions. Candidates should be trying to incorporate opinion, justification and explanation into what they are writing especially if they are aiming to access the higher mark bands. Topics such as the environment and a film review are challenging and should be reserved for the more competent candidates; there were some excellent examples of mature and well-developed pieces on these topics. Some candidates offered pieces on the value or disadvantages of television, writing at length about programmes they liked and disliked, but giving long titles in English, which gave a rather disjointed feel to the pieces.

For weaker candidates, topics such as family, home life, school and town were popular and, while these are perhaps less demanding, they sometimes lead to repetitive descriptions which are not developed. Moreover, these topics can sometimes be restricted to the use of the present tense and, while the mark scheme does not specify the need to use a range of tenses, a more able candidate will want to show competence in the language by using a variety of tenses.

Letter-writing was popular, in particular combined with the topic of work experience, with candidates responding to an offer of a work placement. Some encountered difficulties with maintaining a consistency of address, beginning with the more appropriate *usted* but then reverting to *tú* as the piece progressed. Centres are advised to prepare candidates for the language needed for successful letter-writing (appropriate beginnings and endings of formal or informal letters), if this is to be the task.

Many centres had taken on board the need for candidates not to write at excessive length; stronger candidates should be able to express their ideas with a good variety of structures within the word length recommended in the specification (200-300 words per task). Candidates aiming at grades C-G, (recommended to produce 100-175 words per task) are often disadvantaged by

writing long pieces as they tend to repeat content and their level of error increases. It should be remembered that, while the mark scheme is applied positively, if inaccuracies cause the message to be obscured, then communication has not been successful and this will affect the mark awarded.

The Candidate's Notes Form [Form GCW935] was more successfully used this year and there was evidence that centres had given candidates advice about how best to use this form. There were fewer cases of candidates exceeding the 40-word limit and no reported incidents of candidates writing continuous prose which they could "lift" into their piece. There are still some centres in which the candidates do not use the support offered by these forms; if this is the case, centres are reminded of the need to submit a blank copy of the form.

Clear communication is essential to access the highest mark bands; as last year, communication can sometimes be obscured by misspelling, grammatical inaccuracies and even poor punctuation. Centres should advise candidates of the need to use full stops and commas as a minimum.

Many candidates this year showed an impressive command of the language with good idiomatic use, a variety of tenses and a wide knowledge of vocabulary. There was also evidence of an understanding of the subjunctive mood, although this is not a requirement at this level.

Others struggled to use a dictionary effectively (eg *yo testamento ir* for 'I will go') and there were still many of the commonly recurring problems such as the use of *ser* and *estar*; the incorrect use of *hay* (*mi colegio hay...*); incorrect verb endings; the omission of accents in the preterite tense which can change the meaning of a word (*bailo...bailó*); misuse of preterite and imperfect tenses; the use of infinitives for conjugated verbs and failure to use an infinitive after a finite verb (*quiero voy; prefiero tengo; me gusta bailo*). In addition, the mark scheme refers to "some common idioms" which most candidates do incorporate into their work (*me gusta...; suele; hace dos años* etc.) but a minority of candidates still overuse proverbs or sayings, often inappropriately. Weaker candidates still struggle to connect verbs and often misspell common expressions (*mi gusta; me hermano; prefeiro*).

Centres are asked to ensure that they send the Centre Authentication Form [CCS160] and the Centre Attendance Register to the examiner. It is also helpful if each candidate's submission is held together, ideally with a treasury tag rather than plastic wallets, and should have a Cover Sheet [Form GCW939] completed with the candidate's details.

The attention of centres is also drawn to the need for legible handwriting on the part of the candidate and the need for the submission to be produced on suitable stationery. Finally, centres are reminded of the need to comply with the submission deadlines given by OCR.

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