

Portuguese

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J736**

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

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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CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Portuguese (J736)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

Portuguese Spoken Language (J036)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

Portuguese Written Language (J136)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
A831 Listening	1
A832 Speaking	3
A833 Reading	5
A834 Writing	7

A831 Listening

General Comments

The examination was pitched at the right level. The level of difficulty is comparable to last year's examination.

On the whole, most candidates coped well with all parts of the examination. Sometimes candidates did not attempt some answers. There was no pattern to answers which were not attempted.

Problems occurred where candidates had to write out answers to questions. Many candidates were unable to express themselves clearly (and often legibly) in English. Some did not follow the rubric in Exercise 7 and transcribed what they heard, rather than selecting the correct statement from the list.

Exercise 1

Most candidates coped well with this exercise. Pictures were clear and distinct.

Exercise 2

Most candidates coped well with this exercise. As above.

Exercise 3

Most candidates coped well but many demonstrated their poor knowledge of English. In answer to question 17, many candidates included "each other", although these words were at the end of the space provided for the answer. This did not cause any issues and they were still awarded the mark.

Exercise 4

As in Exercise 3, most candidates coped well with this exercise but many demonstrated their poor knowledge of English. Very often candidates did not ensure their answers made sense. Some candidates did not attempt to answer one or more questions, but there was no pattern either to unanswered questions or wrong answers.

Q. 19 – A range of spelling, something akin to "administration" was accepted.

Q. 21 – Wrong answers included: assist lessons; receive information; to have a formation lessons; watch lessons.

Q. 22 – Wrong answers included: practical school; school with techniques; techic school; ticnic school; school nearby; in school.

Q. 23 – Mostly well done. A few candidates wrote "speak English" rather than "Portuguese".

Q. 24 – Many candidates did not give a full answer here. Wrong answers included: send info about grades courses and pay a little; what they got in school ; about computer results and pay money; your study; what they have learnt; internet; in internet and has to pay; themselves.

Exercise 5

These five questions gave rise to the most mistakes. A number of candidates left some or all questions unanswered.

Q. 25 challenged the candidates' ability to express 'all year long'. Mainly well done, with a few that could not express this. Wrong answers included: it is summer every year; hot weather; summer; you can go to the beach and relax; sea; because of the beach its hot; swimming.

Q. 26 was often clumsily tackled, sometimes even using Portuguese. Some candidates had trouble with "waves", writing "ounds" or similar (from the Portuguese *ondas*)
Wrong answers included: very warm water; clam water – carm; water good for swimming/surfing; windy sea – good waves; there's a lot of beaches; relaxed.

Q. 27 saw many No Responses. Wrong answers included: went for walks; walk; walk about in town long ones; people are kind; people are calm and cool; she done walks travelled around long time; would go on long trips.

Q. 28 challenged their English language to express 'fit for purpose'. A good number of candidates wrote "the shoes were good/ comfortable" but this was not a complete response. Wrong answers included: walk in mountain; she was happy with her shoes because she use it at mornings; she could wake up the mountains; she can 'escalate' mountains; they were nice to walk the mountain; because she can wake better.

Q. 29 – For this question we accepted two possible answers: she goes out early OR when it's cool/fresh. As a consequence, most candidates found it all right, though a few wrote "gets up early" which was rejected.

Exercise 6

Most candidates answered well.

Exercise 7

As mentioned above, some candidates transcribed what they heard and if it was not very close to the given phrase, it was rejected. This was fair as the rubric should be adhered to and it was a relatively uncomplicated exercise.

Exercise 8

Most candidates answered this well. The exercise was sufficiently challenging to differentiate the weaker from the more able listeners.

A832 Speaking

General Comments

There were many examples of excellent examining by efficient teachers with enthusiastic and well-prepared candidates. These candidates understood what was expected of them and many confidently produced high quality language and developed their ideas.

The candidates depend on the teacher asking the right questions, showing an interest in and responding to what they say. Most fluent Portuguese speakers still needed guidance and appropriate questioning to encourage them to develop their ideas fully and to use a variety of tenses and structures. The way the teacher poses questions influences the way the candidate answers; too many closed questions stop the candidates giving their opinions and points of view and developing their reasons for those.

Effective planning by many teachers ensured that their candidates were offered differentiated questions. Some candidates needed very sympathetic examining, with many closed questions to give them confidence and found it difficult to deal with more open questions. Other candidates thrived on fewer, more open questions. Succinct questions enabled the candidates to focus on their responses. Generally, the less said by the teacher, the more time the candidate had to produce both the content and quality of language to gain marks.

Some teachers interrupted when candidates began to develop and explain their ideas and some teachers recited the list of suggested questions, regardless of the candidate's responses.

Part 1 Presentation and Discussion

The most successful presentations tended to be those where the candidates had chosen a topic that they found particularly interesting. As a result, they conveyed genuine enthusiasm and considerable knowledge.

Teachers should reassure candidates that they do not need to rush through the presentation, as the discussion gives them the opportunity to expand.

Teachers sometimes do not meet the candidates before the day of the test. They should speak to each candidate before the test to explain what is expected. This would ensure that preparation time can be used productively.

When a presentation was mainly a narrative, some teachers chose questions specifically to encourage candidates to express opinions and develop ideas. Some presentations were mainly in the present tense and used only simple structures. Teachers could help their candidates achieve higher marks by asking discussion questions that require the use of a variety of tenses and structures in their answers.

Part 2 General Conversation

Confident candidates tended to respond very well to open questions which provided them with the best opportunity to express opinions and use a greater variety and range of language structures and tenses. Some teachers started with a few closed questions to put nervous candidates at ease before progressing to more open questions to encourage candidates to demonstrate their language skills.

Many teachers managed to make this part of the test a genuine conversation and gave the candidates opportunities to respond fully and to use a variety of tenses and structures.

The administration was generally satisfactory.

Centres are reminded to:

- ensure that the examination room is quiet and free from disturbance
- complete and send the Speaking Mark Sheets with the cd and the attendance register, making sure the Topics for Part 1 and Part 2 are written on the sheets
- ensure that candidates' Speaking Test Notes are 5 bullet points, each with 8 words maximum.
- retain the Speaking Test Notes forms in the centre.

Recordings should be:

- on cd only
- in mp3 format
- with a separate, labelled file for each candidate
- checked to ensure that they are audible
- carefully packaged.

Teachers should:

- prepare carefully
- be aware that timings do not include the information given at the beginning of each recording, nor the part where the examiner offers the candidates the choice of Part 2 topics
- allow one minute for the Presentation and not interrupt the candidate with questions unless the candidate stops talking
- offer candidates the choice of one of the three topics from the Random Order Sheet for the General Conversation section.

A833 Reading

The Reading Paper was well received. Over 68% had 34 marks and more out of 50. Teachers have to be congratulated on their work; most candidates used their knowledge and skills appropriately to respond to the tasks. Some candidates did not read the instructions and responded in the wrong language and therefore did not gain marks.

The multiple choice exercises suited very many candidates in exercises 1-4 and 6.

Exercise 1 – Qs 1-5

This exercise was done well.

Exercise 2 – Qs 6-12

Most candidates managed to answer these questions. Few did not relate the concept of 24 hours with a date circled in the calendar, for the answer for Q8, and confused it with 24th December or Christmas Day, which was the answer for Q9. For this reason they didn't respond appropriately to Qs 8 and 9.

For Q12 the text referred to selling tickets (H). Instead, some candidates associated it with selling biscuits (B).

Exercise 3 – Qs 13 -18

This exercise was done well by candidates.

Exercise 4 – Qs 19 – 24

There were good responses that gave the expected answers.

Exercise 5 – Qs 25 – 31

The need to answer these questions in English caused difficulties to many candidates whose command of English was not very secure.

Q25 required the response 'cook/chef' but a considerable number responded 'cooker'.

Q26 The answer was 'steak'. In Portuguese the word for steak is 'bife'; many Portuguese candidates wrote 'beef' and lost a mark.

Q27 The quality of language was not always consistent; the word 'soup' appeared with different spellings.

To get a mark for Q28 candidates needed to respond 'mango mousse'.

Q29 and 30 mostly resulted in the expected answers, some with incorrect spelling.

Q31 caused some difficulty as some candidates started by writing 'healthy diets' followed by 'doesn't eat fast food'. It brought a smile on our faces when some candidates wrote 'eating very fast' instead of 'fast food'.

Exercise 6 – Qs 32 -37

The multiple choice exercise suited many candidates that have a lesser command of English and these scored high marks.

Exercise 7 – Qs 38 – 44

Many managed this exercise well. This exercise tested a spread of abilities and helped to differentiate the candidates.

Q38 required mentioning the age 'young people under 18 or up to 18' and some candidates gave a general response just writing 'young people' and lost a mark.

Q39 'chosen or prepared by young people' was the expected answer and there were a wider range of replies.

Q40 was well-managed.

Q41 had very interesting ways of spelling 'voluntarily'.

Q42 and 43 were well-answered.

Q44 Some candidates did not seem to have the knowledge required to respond correctly as the word crossed out was again used in the answer.

Exercise 8 – Qs 45 – 50

This exercise was a good discriminator and the candidates that struggled in English felt a bit more confident in replying in Portuguese but not everyone was able to convey the correct responses. The best answers to these questions showed understanding of the context, others were very creative.

Q45 to 49 were not always brief but allowed all candidates to gain some marks.

Q50 required an answer that would link work and leisure and again we found a variety of replies.

Despite difficulties with individual questions, most candidates showed that they understood the tasks well and delved into the texts accordingly.

Praise goes to all the teachers who have been able to bring out the best in the candidates.

Teachers are advised to continue their excellent work giving particular attention to the following:

- exposing exam candidates to a wide variety of reading material;
- instilling an attentive approach to reading;
- increasing awareness of structural features of the target language.

A834 Writing

Most candidates could develop very good responses, using appropriate and well developed ideas and points of view. A number gave narratives without much development of ideas.

Many explored complex language features and ambitious language in a very controlled, consistent and fluent way. More than one examiner was impressed by the ability of some candidates to use compound tenses, subjunctives and a variety of subordinate clauses with ease.

It is worthwhile looking closely at the published mark scheme, where it is made clear that the use of a wide range of language structures including tenses is rewarded highly.

The strongest impression examiners reported this year was that candidates tended to use language which showed a good range of structures but in which there was a very large number of spelling mistakes. This prevents some of the very best candidates from achieving the highest grade and can prevent good candidates from reaching the grade A which should be within their grasp.

Fewer marks are available for Communication but there are still good candidates who remain with moderate marks because they do not address the instruction that they should explain ideas and points of view. In particular there were candidates who identified themselves as being much younger than sixteen years of age; these candidates could produce a lovely narrative but did not have the level of maturity required to express ideas.

The format of a single, simple question for each topic area seems to be well understood by candidates. There were instances where the candidate wrote about anything related to the topic area in general but the vast majority heeded the specific question set for this particular paper.

There were fewer cases than last year where a candidate responded to all five questions, although the problem has certainly not disappeared. Very many candidates ruin their chances by spreading their energies over five responses – inevitably the quality of the work is reduced. Only the total of the best two marks is submitted.

As seen last year, there were candidates who showed potential but devoted too many of their 150 words to addressing the first two or three bullets and neglected to spend enough time on expressing their ideas and developing them fully. The first two bullets, particularly, do not serve the best candidates well and they would do well to ignore them. The purpose of these bullets, it should be repeated, is to help weaker candidates to start writing on the question. Many weaker candidates were indeed helped by them and then went on to tackle the more demanding bullets that follow.

The bulleted suggestions can be ignored totally without any negative effect on the mark awarded. Indeed, there were many candidates who looked at the question and wrote according to their own interpretation. There were many very high marks achieved by candidates who showed very personal responses.

Examiners are also seeing potentially good candidates who do not achieve top grades because they do not use complex language including a full range of tenses. In this specification candidates are encouraged to develop ideas rather than narrate events, so it does require some imagination to introduce a wide range of tenses when a piece of writing is largely a discussion of ideas.

Poor handwriting and inadequate punctuation often combined to make the examiners' task very difficult, so difficult that they sometimes had to describe sections of the response as incomprehensible.

Weaker candidates should be reminded not to treat the suggested bullets as questions for which they are to provide an answer. There is a tendency for such pupils, who may rely on the bullets to help them plan their response, to begin paragraphs as a direct answer and they do not state what exactly they are writing about. In cases like this the candidate is not successful in communicating and so does not receive credit for the work.

Many candidates failed to follow the instruction that the two pieces should be written for different purposes. In some cases the candidate wrote pieces in an identical style but headed them "letter" and "blog" – examiners were not persuaded by this ruse.

The dialogue format was adopted by many candidates: this is difficult to do well and achieve high marks. For example, in Question 1 there was one response where the candidate wrote a dialogue between two friends planning to go out together. There was no discussion of ideas or development of opinions so the mark could not be a good one. The best dialogues contained some level of disagreement between the speakers. Nevertheless there were other candidates who made a success of the format – full marks can be, and were, obtained using this format.

Other popular formats were blogs, personal letters and formal letters. At times, writing a diary led to a candidate writing a narrative rather than developing ideas.

Some candidates showed vocabulary problems, which is surprising when they are allowed to use a dictionary in the examination. Examples of common words which posed problems were 'excited', 'holiday' and 'subjects'.

Handwriting was usually very good and easy to read. Those candidates who find it difficult to improve their poor handwriting could make matters easier by developing the skill of punctuation. Often candidates' lack of punctuation made the understanding of their writing very difficult.

Q1

This was the most popular of the five questions and produced many excellent responses, even from candidates who clearly had problems in expressing themselves but nevertheless had plenty of ideas about why friends were important and what qualities a good friend needed to have. So long as their writing could be understood, no matter how many spelling errors, their work was credited for the Communication mark.

Many candidates wanted to use the verb *confiar* and had trouble in knowing which preposition to use. There were many sentences like *só tenho alguns amigos que eu confio com*. The meaning is clear and so Communication marks are awarded but of course the Quality of Language mark is affected.

Q2

Candidates sometimes struggled to find a word to convey "fit", sometimes using *forte* but most knew *saudável*. As stated earlier, it is surprising that candidates should struggle with vocabulary when they are allowed to take a dictionary into the examination room.

Some candidates treated the bullets as questions and their responses were consequently not appropriate. For example, one candidate began a paragraph with *Na minha opinião é porque eles comem ...* which is a clear follow-on from the fifth bulleted suggestion but in the context of the examination they needed to explain themselves fully.

Healthy living included comments about a good diet and its benefits and enhanced this question in response to bullets four and five, along with comments about the disadvantages of fast food. Weaker candidates wrote only narratives about the sports they play and watch.

Q3

This was a very popular question. Often, though, the responses were not of the highest standard. When a candidate writes that his or her favourite artist is, say, Eminem, they should then explain why this singer appeals to them. Many did, often revealing strong reasons for having this preference. Other candidates left their opinion expressed and then moved on to another one without explaining their reasons.

Those candidates who followed the bullets suggesting ideas for their response sometimes interpreted the last bullet wrongly and simply gave the name of an artist who, in their opinion, gives a good example to young people. This could be because they did not know English well enough. The aim of the final bullet, as always, was to encourage speculative thought, and there were many candidates who developed a good response to this idea.

Q4

This question was usually seen as an opportunity to write about holidays or annual visits to Portugal but, provided there was some discussion of the values of travel, then the candidate could reach a high mark. Many seemed to have prepared, in advance of the exam, examples of how to write a good piece on how they spend their holidays, and this is of course excellent preparation. However, the best candidates must be aware that for the highest marks they should always answer the question set and keep their response fully relevant.

There were many good responses which gave a considered account of the value of travel and its beneficial effects on young people.

Many candidates who followed the bulleted suggestions interpreted “harm the environment” as the way that tourism can cause pollution or that tourists drop litter. A large number, though, developed this point into a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the effects of tourism.

Q5

This was a very open question and so candidates were at liberty to write on anything relating to their education. Most used the bullets for guidance and the best ones were where the candidate related his or her understanding of their own personality to the type of job they would like to do in the future.

Many boys, predictably, had the ambition of becoming professional footballers but of these there were plenty who had plans for a back-up career and the best were able to explain why they needed a back-up plan.

The best marks, of those who followed the bulleted suggestions, were achieved by candidates who were capable of discussing how important a high salary was to them in their choice of career plan.

There were some excellent responses which took the format of a letter of application for a job.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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