

Examiners' Reports

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J032/J132/J732/R/11

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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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Unit A721 Listening

Centres had prepared candidates well to deal with the revised format of the examination and there were very few instances of rubric errors.

The examination was successful in producing a spread of marks which allowed for clear differentiation between candidates of different abilities.

The tiers of entry determined by the centres for their candidates appeared to be generally appropriate, although centres are advised to continue to exercise caution when entering weaker candidates for the Higher Tier examination.

In this first year of full entry for the specification, centres are reminded that unfamiliar vocabulary – that is, vocabulary items which do not appear in the published OCR list – is included in assessment materials. At Foundation Tier, candidates will be able to answer successfully without needing to understand such items. At Higher Tier, some unfamiliar vocabulary items will be tested, although this will only be the case in the exercises designed to test the highest grades.

Foundation Tier

The first three exercises were generally well answered and there did not appear to be any specific difficulties with the exception of questions 13 and 15 in exercise 2 and question 19 in exercise 3 which challenged some candidates.

The upward incline of difficulty, which is a part of the design of this paper, meant that candidates began to find the stimulus material more challenging in exercises 4 and 5.

In exercise 4, questions 25 and 28 caused the most difficulties, whilst the other questions in this exercise were answered correctly by about two thirds of candidates. Exercise 5 differentiated very effectively with around two thirds of candidates scoring the full two marks on question 32, half on questions 33 and 34 and a third on question 35. This is in line with expectations of candidates at the end of the Foundation Tier paper.

Higher Tier

In exercise 1 most Higher Tier candidates scored well, question 7 being the least well answered. In exercise 2 candidates also performed well and there was no particular area of difficulty.

In exercise 3 there was a wider spread of marks. The best answered questions were 14 and 15, and those causing the most difficulty were 13 and 16.

In line with the upward incline of difficulty that is a part of the design of this paper, candidates tended to find the stimulus material more testing in exercises 4 and 5.

Exercise 4, requiring candidates to write answers as part of an open close exercise, produced a wide spread of marks and differentiated well. In line with experience from the previous specification, the requirement to identify material from the recording and draw inferences from it made this exercise more challenging. This is an integral part of the design of this exercise, targeted at grade A. In exercise 4 most difficulty was encountered in question 19(a). Best answered were questions 17(a) and 17(b) and question 19(b).

In exercise 5 candidates found the material challenging. This is to be expected in an exercise targeted at grade A*. Best answered were questions 21 to 23, while questions 24 to 26 were correctly answered by about a third of candidates. Question 27 caused considerable difficulty with very few candidates scoring the full two marks. It is worth pointing out with regard to question 27 that teaching items of vocabulary such as '*cordero*' and '*cereza*' should not be neglected now that role-plays are no longer a required feature of the speaking assessment.

Unit A722 Speaking

Most centres generally coped well with the requirements of the new specification. In some cases, some documents were omitted from the submission and had to be requested. In most cases, requests were dealt with promptly and efficiently. Teachers are advised to check the OCR instructions carefully as omissions can delay the moderators' task. Centres are particularly asked to ensure the accuracy of mark entry. Some centres submitted transposed marks for the two tasks, necessitating a complete resubmission for all candidates. In order to avoid arithmetic errors in totalling candidates' marks, teachers are advised to use the interactive version of the Working Mark Sheet [Form GCW 932] available from the OCR website. It eliminates the possibility of errors as the software automatically calculates the total mark.

The introduction of digital recordings was a great improvement; the better sound quality was much appreciated by moderators. However, background noise can still present problems, for example noisy corridors are a distraction for all concerned and the shuffling of papers near the microphone makes the moderator's job more difficult. The sound level was also problematic in some tests and a small number of recordings had not been 'finalised' in order that they could be played on a different machine.

Centres must ensure that candidates can be reliably identified. In one centre the teacher did not identify candidates at the start of the recording. This is absolutely vital. A number of centres failed to label their disks adequately. It is good practice to include an insert showing a list of candidates in order of appearance on the disk and, furthermore, to label electronically each recording with individual candidates' details. Some centres' labelling referred to the date of the recording or the topic but did not note the candidate. It is appreciated that the tests were copied from work undertaken over a period of time but the risk of confusion must be eliminated.

The majority of centres kept to the stipulated timings. Where tests were much shorter than four minutes, it was generally assumed that the candidate had produced of his/her best within this time and no benefit would be gained by prolonging the test.

Most centres selected well-practised, traditional topics such as school, 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 across 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 concern over the unpredictability of the questions offered. With more able students, the most effective teacher/examiners made a point of testing candidates by asking probing questions, seeking detail, clarification and examples. With those candidates not expected to achieve the highest marks, opinions and reasons can be sought to elicit a more personalised account. Many teacher/examiners skilfully enabled candidates to use a variety of time frames, to convey a large amount of information and to demonstrate a wide range of language use, increasing the potential for higher marks in the Quality of Language grid. It was clear that many candidates had been trained to structure their reasoning by the appropriate use of adverbs and adverbial phrases.

The preferred task types were those of Presentation and Discussion; Conversation and Interview. A particularly successful interview task was that of applying for a temporary job which allowed exploration of personal information relating to family composition, school background, free time pursuits and work experience before leading on to discussion of the qualities required for the job and ultimate career ambitions. Some centres submitted extended role plays, for example, taking place in a tourist office, and some used pictures from the Role Play 3 of the legacy specification as a springboard for a conversation about a previous experience. Teachers are reminded that the tasks submitted should not be monologues and therefore a balance must be struck between the candidate being allowed to speak uninterrupted and the need for interaction and exchanges between the

teacher/examiner and the candidate. Some candidates' presentations were very long and did not allow sufficient time for a decent discussion to follow, 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.

Moderators reported that, on the whole, candidates had been given every opportunity to demonstrate their ability in Spanish. Some candidates employed an impressive, specialised vocabulary and it was clear that some were motivated by their task and engaged enthusiastically with the teacher/examiner. The incidence of performances disrupted by a severe attack of nerves seemed greatly reduced, presumably due to the scheduling and nature of the test compared to the speaking test of the legacy specification.

One area which some centres might seek to address is that of the compilation of the Speaking Notes Form [Form GCW 937] since some candidates appeared not to have used this to its full potential. At the same time, teachers must ensure that candidates use the Notes Form fairly and in the spirit of the test rather than seeking to gain an unfair advantage by exceeding the number of words allowed (for example, by merging the words of a phrase into one item so that they are counted as one 'word' or by abbreviating words and combining them so that, again, they appear and are counted as one word). The stipulation of a maximum of forty words is self-explanatory.

Teachers are to be congratulated on the accuracy of their application of the marking criteria. The majority of tests were well assessed and the mark scheme was generally well understood. There was evidence of internal moderation having been carried out, as is required to achieve a single order of merit.

Centres' attention is drawn to the fact that each will receive an individual report written by the moderator who assessed their speaking tests. Moderators are strongly urged to give specific advice in order to assist teachers to elicit improved performances from their candidates and to access higher marks where appropriate.

Unit A723 Reading

Centres had prepared candidates well to deal with the revised format of the examination and there were very few instances of rubric errors.

The examination was successful in producing a spread of marks which allowed for clear differentiation between candidates of different abilities, although at Higher Tier many candidates scored high marks.

The tiers of entry determined by the centres for their candidates appeared to be appropriate, and few candidates remained ungraded at Higher Tier.

In this first year of full entry for the specification, centres are reminded that unfamiliar vocabulary – that is, vocabulary items which do not appear in the published OCR list – is included in assessment materials. At Foundation Tier, candidates will be able to answer successfully without needing to understand such items. At Higher Tier, some unfamiliar vocabulary items will be tested, although this will only be the case in the exercises designed to test the highest grades.

Foundation Tier

The first two exercises were generally well answered and there did not appear to be any specific difficulties. Exercise 3 began to differentiate and, in particular, question 19 proved challenging.

In line with the upward incline of difficulty that is a part of the design of this paper, candidates tended to find the material more testing in exercises 4 and 5.

In exercise 4 it became noticeable that certain questions proved more challenging for the candidates. Questions 30 and 32 were the least well answered and 27 and 28 the best answered.

Candidates found difficulty in exercise 5 questions 35, 36 and 39. Question 33 was generally well answered.

Higher Tier

The first two exercises were generally well answered with questions 8 and 12 causing the most difficulties.

In exercise 3 questions 16, 17 and 21 were best answered and question 23 caused the most difficulty.

In exercise 4 there was good performance in most questions, with question 28 causing the most difficulty.

In exercise 5, designed to test at A* standard, candidates found the assessment material more challenging and questions 37 and 38 presented most difficulties.

Unit A724 Writing

This was the first year of a full cohort entry for this specification. This year's cohort submitted many written pieces which were well-produced, with clear communication and well-developed ideas, and many candidates had the opportunity to demonstrate their control of the language and their ability to manipulate it and express themselves.

The tasks set by the centres were, on the whole, appropriate to the candidates' abilities and interests. Popular topics were holidays, school life, town and local area, the environment, healthy lifestyle and leisure activities. However, centres are reminded to produce tasks that differentiate and give the best possible opportunity to all candidates across the ability range. For example, some excellent pieces were produced on the topic of a film review but some weaker candidates found this task too challenging for their linguistic ability and listed the names of actors and films in English.

Candidates aiming for grades G-D write more clearly and effectively when they do not write at excessive length. Many candidates tried to write pieces to meet the criterion "up to 600 words across the two tasks", even though this was too challenging for their linguistic abilities. Centres should guide their candidates not to write excessively long pieces or to aim at the higher word limit if this is inappropriate, as excessive length can jeopardise the coherence of the piece, lead to repetition and increase the number of linguistic errors.

The best pieces were those which showed originality and an individual approach. Many examiners reported that some centres appeared to have trained their candidates to follow a "template" framework and that some candidates appeared to have memorised their work for their final assignment. While some candidates were able to produce complex and successful language, others omitted significant words or parts of a phrase and this hindered communication. Moreover, pieces prepared in this way within a centre had a similar format and content. Centres are reminded that the purpose of this component is to give candidates the opportunity to use their language to produce an individual response to a given topic area so that they are not constrained by a prescribed task. The Writing Information Form [Form GCW 934] is intended to offer bullet point suggestions (in English) of areas that the candidate might like to consider but these are not meant to be prescriptive. The ideas and the development should be the candidate's own and, indeed, it is those candidates who are able to develop the piece along their own lines who tend to score high marks.

Centres are also advised that the Writing Notes Form [Form GCW 935] is provided to give the candidate support. There were many cases of this form being submitted blank or with words written in English. In addition, the centres' attention is drawn to the word limit of 40 words, in five bullet points of no more than eight words each. Teachers should check that the candidate has not exceeded the correct number of words on the Notes Form before the final task is produced. In addition, candidates should not write 40 words of continuous prose which can be "lifted" into the piece. Centres can help candidates by giving guidance on how to use the Candidate's Notes Form before the preparation sessions.

The majority of centres met the requirement that the candidate should produce two pieces on a different topic area, each for a different purpose. It was noted that some centres submitted two tasks on the same two topics for each candidate. Centres are reminded of the value of building up a "portfolio" for each candidate from which to select the best two pieces at the end of the course to give the candidates the experience of writing on a range of topics during the course. The increased freedom in this specification, which allows candidates to write on topics of interest to them, should help to motivate and encourage them.

Clear communication is necessary to access the highest mark bands. Very often communication was hindered by a lack of punctuation, careless spelling or grammatical inaccuracies. Examiners also reported many instances of poor communication caused by misuse of the dictionary.

Some centres had clearly prepared candidates to incorporate a range of tenses and some interesting structures into their answers. Some candidates were able to follow this advice successfully while others produced these structures in a somewhat contrived way that stood out against basic errors in the rest of the piece. Many centres had encouraged their candidates to use the subjunctive mood and, in some cases, this led to pieces of writing in which candidates had struggled to include unfamiliar pre-learnt phrases and expressions.

Centres should take into account the appropriateness of the register of the language used; for example, a formal letter would require more formal vocabulary and structures than an e-mail to a friend. There were often cases where the candidate had produced a piece which did not contain language appropriate to the register required by the task set and there were frequent errors involving the use of *tú*, *usted* and *vosotros*.

Common linguistic errors involved the use *ser* and *estar*; failure to use an infinitive after a finite verb e.g. *espero voy...* *me gusta tengo*; incorrect verb endings; incorrect position of the negative; failure to insert *que* when linking sentences e.g. *tengo un hermano se llama Daniel*. In addition, many candidates did not vary the vocabulary and structures used, making the piece repetitive and limited. Candidates in some centres used a wide variety of subordinate clauses, incorporating sentences with *si...*, *cuando...*, and also using a variety of linking structures such as *así que...*, *puesto que...*, *ya que...*, *dado que...* rather than limiting themselves to *porque*. There were also some good uses of the subjunctive, such as *Si tuviera mucho dinero, viajaría por todo el mundo*, although use of the imperfect subjunctive is not a requirement at this level. It should be stressed that use of sophisticated language such as this does not compensate for basic errors in more accessible structures or an inability to connect verbs.

Centres are asked to ensure that they send the Centre Authentication Form [Form CCS160] and the Centre Attendance Register to the examiner. It is also helpful for the examiner if each candidate's submission is held together with a treasury tag and has a Cover Sheet [Form GCW 939] 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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