

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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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.

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. There remain some cases of candidates who appeared to be entered for the incorrect tier; this was especially true of the best foundation candidates, some of whom could have attempted higher tier. It is, however, encouraging that all but a handful of higher tier candidates were correctly entered.

In the current specification, all the vocabulary tested at foundation tier, and all but a small number of items at higher tier, 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 paper but that answers will not depend exclusively on understanding this vocabulary.

Candidates generally wrote clearly but, in training their candidates, centres should continue to instruct them to cross out clearly any notes or discarded answers, lest they should accidentally invalidate otherwise creditable responses. There were very few cases where the legibility of handwriting caused examiners difficulties.

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. Many candidates answered without difficulty and scored close to full marks; question 11 caused some difficulty and produced answers such as 'he hasn't much money'. Similarly, question 13 caused difficulties for candidates who misread the question as 'where' rather than 'when' and gave 'hostel', rather than the required 'August'. In question 12, a good number of candidates did not know 'padres' as 'parents' and did not get the mark because they gave 'father'.

Ex 3 This exercise is targeted at Grade E. Many candidates continued answering well. Questions 17 and 18 were answered incorrectly by some candidates, but there was no identifiable pattern of incorrect responses.

Ex 4 This exercise is targeted at Grade D. The level of difficulty rose slightly in this exercise and this produced differentiation. Questions 26, 27 and 29 were well answered by the majority of candidates and questions 24, 25 and 28 presented some difficulty, indicating that vocabulary knowledge in this area was not consistent. There were clear signs that the need to deal with longer uninterrupted recorded speech challenged some candidates. Please note that, in accordance with the design of the examination paper, the increased complexity of the language heard is intentional.

Ex 5 This exercise is targeted at Grade C. It differentiated effectively between candidates. Questions 31 to 33 proved more challenging than question 34. The need to understand a variety of contexts and to analyse what was heard to reach the answer made this exercise

the most challenging section of the paper. A rising gradient of differentiation is, however, part of the design of the examination.

Higher Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. The majority of higher tier candidates scored well on this first cross-over exercise.
- Ex 2** This exercise is targeted at Grade C and it required candidates to understand not only gist but also detail, as well as to make a move to more conceptual understanding. There was a marked difference between higher tier candidates, who performed consistently well on this exercise and foundation tier candidates whose performance was variable. This second cross-over exercise differentiated well at the important C grade boundary.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade B. There was little difference in the performance of candidates on any particular question with many candidates typically scoring full marks.
- Ex 4** As is to be expected in an exercise aimed to differentiate at grade A, the material proved testing for all but the most competent candidates as they needed to draw inferences from what was heard. Questions 17(b) and 18(a) were challenging and 18(b) was sometimes answered incorrectly perhaps because candidates know the word 'vela' in the context of sailing but not perhaps as candle and wrote 'lit by boats' or similar. Question 20 also proved to be challenging for some candidates.

As mentioned in previous reports, centres could advise candidates to expect a distraction in this exercise as it is designed to differentiate by the inclusion of longer utterances unrelated to specific answers, reflecting more closely the patterns of natural speech.

- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade A* and requires understanding of longer and more complex sequences of speech at the natural speed of spoken Spanish. Candidates need to recognise points of view, attitudes and emotions and to draw conclusions. The requirement for precision in the responses, as indicated in the published mark scheme, meant that this exercise differentiated very effectively.

Unit A722 Speaking

General Comments

Some centres conducted tests of a pleasing standard which elicited an individual performance and gave candidates the opportunity to showcase what they knew and could do. In the best cases, the 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.

Centres are reminded of the need to send to the moderator the GCW 937 forms (Student's Notes Forms) for **both** Task 1 and Task 2. Full guidance on what needs to be submitted, how and when is given in the Guide to Controlled Assessment in GCSE Modern Foreign Languages – Speaking. This publication can be accessed on the GCSE Spanish support materials area on the OCR website.

Teachers are requested to check OCR instructions carefully as omissions can delay the moderation process. The stipulations regarding the submission of work for A722 are contained in the document mentioned earlier, on pages 60 and 61.

The preferred task types were once again those of Presentation and Discussion; Conversation and Interview. The most popular topic areas were Self and Family, School, Work Experience, Holidays, Local Area or Free Time.

Tasks

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 very long and did not allow sufficient time for a discussion to follow, thereby removing the opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate their ability to respond spontaneously, to engage in exchanges, to deal with unpredictable elements and, ultimately, to access the full range of marks.

Topics

All topics worked best when there was some variation in 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 or personal expression unless this has been encouraged in class. Some centres appeared to operate a 'template' type approach such that candidates produced the very same material when speaking freely and were asked the very same questions; some even produced the same responses. Such an approach obviously leads the moderator to question the degree of unpredictability in the tests and this is likely to lead to the full range of marks not being accessible.

Communication

Marks for Communication should be based on the amount of information and number of ideas successfully conveyed by the candidate. Account should be taken of any hesitation and ambiguity and how much the candidate elaborated on their answers and whether or not they needed questions repeated or rephrased. Material introduced by the teacher is not rewarded so caution is advised when questioning candidates; closed questions are of little value to

candidates unless they are struggling and the teacher believes that an easy question will re-establish confidence and assist them to continue. More able candidates can be given the opportunity to show their interactive skills with challenging questions which are designed to stretch them by seeking further detail, clarification and examples. They should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer strings of communication. With candidates who are not expected to achieve the highest marks, opinions and reasons can be sought in order to elicit a more personalised account.

Quality of Language

In terms of Quality of Language, high marks can be achieved by encouraging candidates (who are able to) to incorporate more complex structures and a wider range of vocabulary. For candidates other than the most able, individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by the 'same task for all' approach. For example, when speaking about members of the family, the use of adjectives to describe character and physique can distinguish between candidates.

Teachers must be careful not to reward language which is mainly error-free but very simple with a high Quality of Language mark. The higher ranges of the marking criteria are for successful use of more ambitious structures and vocabulary.

Pronunciation

Pronunciation tended to be at least fairly good in most centres, with marks of 4 and 3 commonly achieved. For some candidates, however, interference from English, and unclear vowels in particular, seriously hindered comprehension, and this impacted on their overall mark. Stress patterns on individual words were sometimes problematic. Teachers need to alert candidates of the ambiguity that can be caused, for example, when some future or preterite tense verb forms are incorrectly stressed. Some centres appeared to view the pronunciation mark as being directly linked to the Quality of Language mark and, as a result, some candidates who did not produce much content were marked low despite the fact that their pronunciation was reasonably accurate.

Quality of the recordings

Many centres submitted very good recordings. Some submitted recordings with problems, for example low volume of candidates such that the recording was virtually inaudible. In other cases, the file format was other than those listed in the OCR guidance; mp3 format is recommended because it is the most commonly available and it results in fewer problems and requests for centres to resubmit recordings. Extraneous noises, for example the shuffling of papers near sensitive microphones and the movement of pupils along adjoining corridors, can cause problems when recordings are played back and should be avoided as much as possible.

Centres receive a report on their submission, prepared by the moderator who assessed their speaking tests. Where appropriate, moderators will offer guidance on candidates' performances.

Unit A723 Reading

General Comments

Centres had prepared their candidates well for these examinations. The majority of centres had judged their candidates' abilities well but there were a few who appeared to have been entered for the wrong tier, particularly in the higher tier entry.

The examination papers differentiated well between candidates. It was noticeable that candidates found exercises which require answers in English the most challenging. Centres are advised to make sure that candidates are aware that in the current specification the vocabulary tested is either from the published vocabulary list or a cognate. 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. However, if they make an alteration to their response then discarded items should be clearly crossed out in order not to invalidate an otherwise correct answer.

Foundation Tier

Ex 1 This exercise is targeted at Grade G. The majority of candidates got full marks. There was some confusion between *tenis* and *tenis de mesa* in question 6.

Ex 2 This exercise is targeted at Grade F. It was again well answered by the majority of candidates. Some, however, did not recognise *helado* in question 14; and *piña* in question 15 also caused some problems.

Ex 3 This exercise is targeted at Grade E. The majority of candidates answered the initial questions correctly but found the later ones more challenging. A minority did not understand *nunca lava los platos*, giving more general answers such as *tidies up*. In questions 22 to 24 the vocabulary *un curso de peluquería*, *el mundo de la moda*, and *viajar a otros países* seemed not to be known. *Peluquería* was confused with *película*, and *moda* was thought to be modelling.

Ex 4 This exercise is targeted at Grade D. Responses were mixed at this level. It was noticeable that the answers to questions 31 and 32 were often inverted suggesting that *tengo que ahorrar* and *me quiero casar* were not fully understood.

Ex 5 This exercise is targeted at Grade C. It proved to be challenging with only question 38 well answered. *La parte vieja* did not seem to be understood, as some candidates gave the same answer in question 33 as the example. Similarly, *viajar fácilmente* and *acaban de*, produced inaccurate responses in question 34. In the same way, *me hacen reír* was not always understood and answers given were *action* and *horror*. There was some confusion over *invierno* and *verano* in question 36 and *regalos* was sometimes given as *rulers* or *rules* in question 37. The preposition in *delante del ayuntamiento* in question 39 also seemed to cause some difficulty.

Higher Tier

- Ex 1** This exercise is targeted at Grade D. It was very well answered by candidates in this tier.
- Ex 2** This exercise is targeted at Grade C. On this tier, the candidates coped more successfully with the challenges.
- Ex 3** This exercise is targeted at Grade B. Candidates found it challenging but it differentiated well. In question 18, *grandes pantallas* was understood as *the internet*. In question 17, *carteras and alfombras* were given as *tea towels, key rings, mugs and hats*. In question 19, *se hará conocida por todo el país* was not always understood and *electrical equipment* was a popular suggestion for *sillas de ruedas eléctricas* in question 20. Candidates were able to understand the idea of not winning a prize in question 21 and that people entered the competition for the *honour of winning* rather than for *honour* alone.
- Ex 4** This exercise is targeted at Grade A. There was no consistent pattern of difficulty except that some had read *me resultó difícil seguir las clases* and selected response 'C' (*...the lessons were very hard*) for question 26.
- Ex 5** This exercise is targeted at Grade A*. It differentiated well. In question 38, an incorrect response was 'A' (*...ganar su primer campeonato*), presumably because the candidates read *ganar* and related it back to *lo que me dé la gana* in the text.

Unit A724 Writing

General Comments

This year's submissions were similar in content to those produced in the three previous years of this specification and, once again, there was a wide range in the quality of the work submitted.

The most popular topics this year were school life, home, holidays, healthy living, work experience and local area. Some candidates attempted more ambitious topics, such as a review of a film or the environment, but these were successful only when attempted by the best candidates. The task of accepting a job offer was generally well done, offering the candidate the opportunity to narrate and to use a variety of tenses and structures.

The best pieces were well-constructed, offering opinions and justifications, and developing ideas; candidates who offered a personal response with an interesting story to tell achieved the highest marks. However, tasks often seemed to be following a template which limited creativity and hindered individual expression. Similarity between scripts in some centres showed that candidates were clearly trying to deliver significant amounts of pre-learnt material and the quality of the work was affected by their capacity to remember. When memory failed, communication and structure were impaired. Memorising structures is part of the of language learning process, but candidates who rely completely on trying to reproduce an entire piece from memory, rather than showing the ability to manipulate language, have difficulty maintaining consistency. It is better to encourage students to produce an individual response on a chosen topic.

Candidates who are able to sustain consistency and who can use a variety of structures and clauses with confidence should be encouraged to write to the full word count. The 300 words should be seen as the maximum number of words to ensure that even the best tasks do not become repetitive and do not deteriorate in quality.

Candidates who find this skill challenging should be encouraged to write concisely so that they convey the message clearly. Quality is more achievable in shorter tasks. Often when candidates produce longer tasks material is repeated, there is a lack of coherence and the message is obscured by inaccurate language

Punctuation is important because if it is incorrect it can change or obscure the meaning of a sentence, for example: *es el mejor hotel en el que he estado porque siempre habia. Algo que hacer en todo momento.*

Items of vocabulary that seemed to cause problems were: prefiero (prefiero), quisiera (quisera/quiseria), emocionante (emociante/emocionate), querido (quierdo), deberes (debres), ayudar (ayundar), ciudad (cuidad). In addition, candidates need to proof-read their work in order to avoid contradictions in what they have written: *la visita era interesante pero aburrida.*

Candidates should also be encouraged not to give lists of vocabulary (such as rooms in the house or school subjects) as these do not add value to the task. Similarly they should avoid English usage with Spanish vocabulary in expressions such as *viajar el mundo* and vocabulary such as *brillante* or *excitante*.

Candidates seem to have understood the need to offer opinions and justifications and, in the better tasks, these were varied and interesting. It is important to vary justifications, by going beyond the basic *...porque...*. Alternative ways of making justifications are: to back up a statement by giving more details, a description, an explanation, a judgement and an expansion of personal ideas.

Candidates did use a variety of clause types. These included: *cuando* (often correctly followed by a subjunctive when referring to a future time frame), *si*, *así que*, *ya que*, *puesto que*, *dado que* and *diría que*. Sometimes there was *mientras que...* which can also be useful.

The mark scheme refers to the use of idiom and most candidates are now attempting to do this; even the more common idioms enhance the quality of the work (*tengo 15 años; me gusta...*). Idiom in this sense should not be confused with proverbs which some candidates are still trying to include and which give a very unnatural feel to a task.

Candidates produced some very good language; they showed the ability to use a variety of tenses including, at times, the correct use of the subjunctive. The mark scheme does not necessarily require the use of different tenses but a good candidate will inevitably want to show his/her command of the language by using a variety of time frames if the task allows. Candidates also need to understand the importance of accents to distinguish between the present and the preterite (*bailo/bailó*) and the future and the subjunctive (*bailará/bailara*) if a clear message is to be conveyed.

There are areas of grammar which if produced correctly can enhance the marks for Quality of Language: correct use of *ser* and *estar*, *gustar*, future and conditional tenses, verb forms other than the first person, reflexive verbs, especially in structures such as *puedo relajarse*, subject pronouns (which can be useful for clarification or emphasis) and object pronouns.

From the point of view of administration, it is to the candidates' advantage if the tasks are well-presented, held together by treasury tags (not plastic wallets or staples) and accompanied by the correct paperwork: the CCS160 (Centre Authentication) form, the attendance register and a cover sheet and two notes sheets for each candidate. There is no requirement to send the task sheet.

Overall, it can be said that the best work was seen from candidates who had been encouraged to produce work targeted to their ability; with a focus on a clear message, on a topic relevant to them and in accurate language that they were able to produce with confidence – whether that was complex or straightforward according to what they were capable of.

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