

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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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Persian (J735)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

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A821 Listening

General Comments

Most candidates performed well. Their performance would improve further if they could be encouraged to:

- a) familiarise themselves with the various exercise types and rubrics commonly used in the examination paper.
- b) follow the rubrics carefully.
- c) familiarise themselves with the types of icon commonly used in the paper, e.g. for school subjects or food.
- d) write legibly.
- e) write their answers in the allocated spaces and avoid writing in the margins.
- f) in the case of speakers of Dari (a Persian dialect spoken in Afghanistan), familiarise themselves with the differences between their dialect and Persian as spoken in Iran. This includes vocabulary, pronunciation and some grammatical structures.
- g) when asked to complete sentences in English, ensure that their completed sentences are grammatically correct and make sense.
- h) pay particular attention to spelling, notably the significant role played by the following features in Persian script:
 - dots: the number and position of dots in dot-bearing letters.
 - 'dented' letters: the exact number of 'teeth' required for each letter, e.g. س (s) and ش (sh).
 - the second stroke needed for the Persian letter گ (g) to distinguish it from ک (k). The above features are important because a violation of the rules may create a different word with an entirely different meaning. It can also be significant if answering multiple-choice questions by writing a Persian letter in the box/gap.

Comments on Individual Questions

Exercise 1

Questions were generally answered well. Questions 2 and 5 played a differentiating role.

Exercise 2

Questions were generally answered well. Question 8 played a differentiating role.

Exercise 3

Questions were generally answered well.

Exercise 4

Questions were generally answered well. Questions 23 and 24 differentiated the stronger candidates.

Exercise 5

Questions were generally answered well. Questions 29(a) and 30 played a differentiating role.

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Exercise 6

Questions were generally answered well. Question 32 played a differentiating role.

Exercise 7

Questions were generally answered well.

Exercise 8

Only the strongest candidates obtained full marks for this exercise. Questions 45 and 47 differentiated the stronger candidates. Please also see note (h) above.

A822 Speaking

General Comments

Candidates continue to perform very well in the speaking test, often demonstrating fluency and confidence under examination conditions.

The test consists of two parts:

- Part 1 comprises a one-minute presentation, based on a topic chosen by the candidate, and a follow-up conversation of about four minutes on the same topic.
- Part 2 is a five-minute general conversation between the candidate and the teacher-examiner on a selected topic.

In general the tests were conducted satisfactorily. This document highlights some of the key observations as reported by the principal and assistant examiners who assessed the recorded tests.

Part 1 - Presentation

The presentations were mostly well prepared and delivered in the appropriate register. Among the more popular topics were *Nourooz*, holidays abroad, football, martial arts, school and friends, and home and family.

Some presentations were very short and performed briskly. Candidates should be briefed in detail before the test on the length of their presentation and a suitable speed of delivery.

A number of presentations had been memorised in advance of the test. While candidates are expected to prepare and commit to memory the general structure of the presentation, they should not learn it word for word. The emphasis in this part of the test is not on the ability of candidates to memorise a text accurately, but rather on their skills in speaking freely.

In some cases it was clear that candidates were reading out a text. This is not an acceptable practice.

Follow-up conversation

Candidates were usually comfortable talking in more detail about the topic which they had presented. Often they took the lead and spoke almost without encouragement from the teacher-examiner.

In some cases candidates did not expand greatly upon the key points already covered in the presentation. Candidates should be notified of the need to talk in greater depth on the issues they have mentioned.

Teacher-examiners can help candidates to demonstrate their abilities by asking them open-ended, general questions which encourage them to give full answers. The test should not take the form of an interview with questions which require only brief answers and give little opportunity for the candidate to build full sentences. This pattern appears to be popular among less experienced teacher-examiners who are inquisitive about the more specific features of a candidate's topic at the expense of asking general questions and allowing the candidate to direct the discussion.

Part 2 - General conversation

This part of the speaking test requires the candidate to select a topic from three suggestions, to respond to questions and speak freely on the issues related to the topic.

A sizeable number of candidates were not asked questions which would allow them to use a wide variety of structures and tenses. While candidates' use of present, past or future tense was in most cases correct, one tense was often used disproportionately. A well-balanced mix of tenses is desirable.

Teacher-examiners often used the suggested list of questions at the end of the teacher-examiner's booklet. It should be noted that this list does not have to be used exclusively; it is best used as a guide. The aim of the teacher-examiner must be to provide the candidate with ample opportunities to speak as freely and expansively as possible.

Candidates were sometimes unsure of how long they should continue an answer and, although they were confident speakers and performed with relative ease, there were some instances of undue silence. Teacher-examiners can help the candidate by interjecting reasonably promptly. At the opposite end of the spectrum, teacher-examiners sometimes do not give candidates enough time to respond to questions in full, or they dominate the conversation, both of which may result in lost marks.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is vital that teacher-examiners familiarise themselves with the booklet in advance of the test, whether they are based at the centre or coming in specially to conduct the test. Equally, candidates must be told what to expect; sometimes a lack of familiarity with the format has a noticeable effect on performance and on the marks awarded.

It is also essential that the person conducting the test is a fluent speaker of Persian (Farsi). If the teacher-examiner's delivery is stilted this can be confusing and discouraging for candidates.

Centres must ensure that the instructions regarding the submission of tests are followed. It is not acceptable to send tests on USB sticks. The only acceptable medium is CD and files should be saved in MP3 format. Following these instructions means that candidates' work can be marked without technical obstacles.

A823 Reading

General Comments

The examination marks this year suggest that the candidates found the paper accessible. The overwhelming majority of candidates seem to have sufficient knowledge of Persian and adequate familiarity with the examination format.

Comments on Individual Questions

Exercise 1: Qs 1-5

These questions were very well answered.

Exercise 2: Qs 6-12

The questions and rubrics were understood well and the questions were answered well.

Exercise 3: Qs 13-18

Generally candidates showed a good understanding of the questions and rubrics. Candidates should be reminded that in this type of exercise they are expected to choose answers from the bank of words provided in the box. Similar words or phrases reflecting the same meaning are not accepted as correct answers.

Exercise 4: Qs 19-24

This question was answered well.

Exercise 5: Qs 25-30

Candidates generally understood this exercise and answered the questions well. In question 27 a significant number of candidates showed confusion over the words north, south, east and west. In answer to question 29 they wrote that the camp took place in a park in south London instead of north London. Candidates should also ensure that all necessary detail is provided. In this case the question required 'a park in north London', rather than simply 'north London' or 'a park'.

Exercise 6: Qs 31-36

As for exercise 3, the attention of candidates needs to be drawn to the fact that they must take their answers from the words listed in the box.

Exercise 7: Qs 37-42

Candidates should be advised to read the text carefully before attempting to answer these questions. Answers based on candidates' general knowledge or common sense are not given marks if they do not match the information given in the text. Candidates should ensure that they give all of the required information to answer the question fully. In question 41, for example, 'three and a half hours a day, three days a week' was the required answer.

Exercise 8: Qs 43-48

The need for precision should be emphasised to candidates at this stage in the paper. Simply copying out sentences from the text will not gain marks. Candidates should also be reminded to read the rubrics carefully; answers in English did not gain marks.

A824 Writing

General Comments

The candidates generally performed well in the writing paper this year. It seems that centres have taken note of the advice given on previous occasions. A good proportion of candidates are now approaching the essay topics more subjectively, rather than just giving descriptions and stating facts. They appreciate the importance of expressing personal opinions with justification.

It is also important that each response has a different 'purpose', for example blog/email/letter/magazine article/script of a conversation. Candidates are, however, allowed to write both a letter and an email, or an email and a blog.

Register: The use of appropriate register is important in the writing paper. Where appropriate, candidates should use high register rather than low register used in colloquial Persian.

Illegible answers: A significant proportion of candidates write phonetically, relying on their spoken Persian and their limited knowledge of the alphabet. The texts which they produce are difficult to read and mark.

Some Afghan candidates have Pashto as their mother tongue. The influence of their mother tongue is such that they sometimes replace a Persian word which they do not know with the Pashto or Urdu equivalent. Candidates should be encouraged to seek an alternative way of expressing their meaning in Persian, rather than resorting to a different language.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1 Home and Local Area

Write about your family

The candidates who gained the higher marks tended to include opinions and to justify their statements, as well as mentioning, for example, the number of brothers and sisters they have or the age of their parents.

Question 2 Health and Sport

Write about food

This topic was not handled as successfully as other topics. Some candidates simply described an instance of eating out with their family.

Question 3 Leisure and Entertainment

Write about a good friend or someone famous in music, film, television or sports

The majority of those who attempted this topic described the life of a favourite musician.

Question 4 Travel and the Wider World

Write about travelling

The candidates who answered this question mostly listed activities on holidays and made reference to the weather. They also mentioned why Iran or Afghanistan was their chosen destination. Expressing more opinions would have helped some candidates to access the higher marks.

Question 5 Education and Work
Write about your school life

This subject was generally tackled well by the candidates who chose it. It was systematically and analytically approached and the essays included many opinions and justifications.

General Recommendations

Candidates are reminded that:

- 1 The word limit for each answer is 150 words. Writing more than 150 words does not benefit the candidate.
- 2 As the essays require opinions and justifications it is important to be able to spell words such as 'in my opinion', "به نظر من", 'because', "چون", "به خاطر", "این که" correctly.
- 3 The Ezafeh at the end of a word which indicates the genitive case is not usually written and, if written, it is only in the form of a Kasreh (short vowel sound).
- 4 Learning the correct spelling of basic Persian verbs such as 'doing', 'eating', 'sleeping', 'speaking', and simple words such as 'dear', 'family', 'only', 'food', 'chicken', 'sister' and 'Iran' will make essays clearer and improve the mark given for quality of language.
- 5 Dots are extremely important in the Persian alphabet and it is important that candidates are familiar with the number of dots each letter has.

It is also highly recommended that candidates read some Persian texts before taking the writing examination.

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