

GCSE

Spanish

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J732**

General Certificate of Secondary Education
(Short Course) **J032 J132**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA) is a leading UK awarding body, providing a wide range of qualifications to meet the needs of candidates of all ages and abilities. OCR qualifications include AS / A Levels, Diplomas, GCSEs, Cambridge Nationals, Cambridge Technicals, Functional Skills, Key Skills, Entry Level qualifications, NVQs and vocational qualifications in areas such as IT, business, languages, teaching / training, administration and secretarial skills.

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:

We are grateful to centres for their work in preparing candidates for this unit. It is pleasing to report very minimal numbers of rubric errors or unanswered questions. In general, candidates appeared to have been appropriately entered at Foundation Tier with very small numbers of candidates scoring full or near full marks. At Higher Tier, all but a very small number of candidates were graded, which similarly indicates appropriate decisions made by teachers with regard to tier of entry.

As indicated in previous reports to centres, the current GCSE specification and the design of this paper require the inclusion of some elements of unfamiliar vocabulary not listed on the defined vocabulary content list published by OCR. Answers do not depend on knowledge of this vocabulary with the exception of two items which are tested one in each of Exercises 4 and 5 at Higher Tier. Centres may find it useful to draw future candidates' attention to this feature.

Candidates wrote clearly. We are grateful to centres for continuing to train candidates to cross out any notes or discarded answers carefully so as to avoid accidentally invalidating otherwise correct responses.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Foundation Tier A721/01

- Ex 1** This exercise targeted Grade G. All questions were answered well with only Question 8 causing occasional difficulty to a few candidates.
- Ex 2** This exercise targeted Grade F. Most candidates answered well and scored full marks. Questions 10 and 11(b) caused the most difficulty and weaker candidates made lots of guesses. Centres are reminded that it is important not to neglect basic items of vocabulary during revision and preparation for the examination, nor to narrow teaching through over-focus on the topics typically covered for controlled assessment.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade E. Most candidates continued answering well. Question 13 was the most challenging overall. Question 15 was the best answered. In this exercise the requirement to begin to process longer units of language rather than individual items of vocabulary differentiated effectively at this grade.
- Ex 4** This exercise targeted Grade D and as part of the paper design the level of demand increased. Candidates were required to process longer text and very often the answers were in the middle of a unit of language rather than at the beginning or end. The vocabulary was not complex but the conceptual level increased and the topic of work and leisure was more demanding. As a consequence, this exercise differentiated well, Question 24 proving the most challenging.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade C. It was successful in differentiating at this level and candidate performance declined fairly steadily through the exercise with Questions 20 and 31 scoring 2 marks for about two thirds of the candidates and Questions 32 and 33 proving harder with under half scoring the full 2 marks. Across this exercise the 'Problems' were identified more easily than the 'Suggestions'.

Higher Tier A721/02

- Ex 1** This exercise targeted Grade D and was well answered by the majority of Higher Tier candidates. Questions 3 and 4 proved the most challenging. The pattern of responses was noticeably better than those of Foundation Tier candidates on the equivalent exercise.
- Ex 2** This exercise targeted Grade C and required candidates to process more language and understand gist as well as detail. As part of the pattern of differentiation designed into the paper, the conceptual level of demand also rose and the exercise began to deal with feelings and points of view, which are part of the grade description for Grade C. Overall, and in common with the response pattern at Foundation Tier, Questions 9 and 10 were better answered than Questions 11 and 12, but the proportion of candidates scoring on them rose significantly, which is further evidence that tiers of entry had been used effectively by centres.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade B. It was well answered and approximately two thirds of the candidates scored on Questions 13, 15, 16, 17 and 19; Question 14 proved more challenging and Question 20 a little more accessible. The evenness of the response patterns across questions indicates that this exercise was effective in differentiating at this grade.
- Ex 4** This exercise targeted Grade A. As is to be expected, the level of vocabulary demand as well as linguistic processing rose to match the requirements of the published grade description for Grade A. Candidates had to deal with more demanding topic material and process ideas and points of view. They also had to draw inferences, reach conclusions and deal with an element of distraction and overlap in some of the question items, which is designed to test precise understanding. The most demanding questions were Questions 22, 25 and 28 which were answered correctly by only a very small number of the most able candidates. Questions 26 and 27 were best answered. This exercise differentiated very effectively at its projected grade.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade A* and as is to be expected, challenged all but the most able candidates. A feature of A* targeted exercises in this paper is that candidates need to use their knowledge of Spanish to gather information about a relatively unfamiliar topic area, in this case 'life-coaching'. This allows the most able candidates to demonstrate an ability to comprehend the language for academic purposes as a medium for learning something new. Questions 30, 35 and 36 proved the most challenging. This exercise was highly effective in enabling differentiation at the top end of the candidature.

Unit A722 Speaking

Centres are advised that they will each receive an individual report on their submission, prepared by the moderator who assessed their speaking tests. Where appropriate, moderators offer guidance to assist teachers in eliciting improved performances from their candidates and in accessing higher marks. Attention should be paid to the advice given as it may highlight areas which have hitherto restricted the marks available to candidates. Please also give attention to any comments in reference to the administration of your centre's submission. In particular, please note the accepted digital file formats; these are MPEG Audio Layer 3 (*.mp3) and Windows Media Audio (*.wma) only.

Further information on all aspects of the Speaking tests can be obtained from the Guide to Controlled Assessment in GCSE Modern Foreign Languages – Speaking, which can be accessed by following the link:

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/73017-guide-to-controlled-assessment-speaking.pdf>

Moderators reported that the preferred task types were those of Presentation and Discussion; Conversation and Interview. Most centres selected topic areas such as Free Time, Holidays, Local Area, School, Self and Family and Work Experience. Environmental Issues was a topic sometimes chosen to stretch higher-scoring candidates.

In the popular task type of Presentation and Discussion, moderators encountered a tendency for candidates to be allowed to speak uninterrupted at great length without adequate time being given to the Discussion element of the task. Such an approach leads to an unbalanced test, sometimes resulting in virtually a monologue. In such circumstances, candidates cannot demonstrate an ability to respond spontaneously, to engage in exchanges with their interlocutor, to deal with unpredictable elements and, ultimately, to access the full range of marks. 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.

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. Such an approach obviously leads the moderator to query the degree of unpredictability in the tests and is likely to lead to the full range of marks not being accessible.

In terms of the Communication mark, centres are reminded that marks should be based on the amount of information and number of ideas successfully conveyed by the candidate, it should also take into account any hesitation and ambiguity and reflect how much the candidate elaborated on their answers and whether or not they needed questions repeated or rephrased. Material introduced by the teacher will not be rewarded, so caution is advised when questioning candidates; closed questions are clearly 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 by testing them 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. In the case of those candidates not expected to achieve the highest marks, opinions and reasons may be sought in order to elicit a more personalised account.

With regard to the Quality of Language strand, high marks can be achieved by encouraging capable candidates to demonstrate their ability by incorporating more complex structures and a wider range of vocabulary. For all candidates, individual accounts are more impressive than those that appear to have been generated by a 'template' approach. Teachers must be careful not to reward with a high Quality of Language mark a set of utterances which is mainly error-free but very simple; this cannot be justified. The higher ranges of the marking criteria are for successful use of more ambitious structures and vocabulary. Moderators found that teachers sometimes awarded marks from the 7 - 8 band but this was inappropriate, for example, when the test did not stray beyond the commonplace or the candidate's attempts to include more complex language features were consistently executed without success.

Pronunciation tended to be at least fairly good in most centres, with marks of 4 and 3 commonly achieved. However, when candidates' poor pronunciation seriously hinders comprehension, this has an impact on the Communication mark. The most common problems experienced are interference from the native tongue; indistinct vowels and the production of certain consonants. As may be expected, the problematic consonants for English speakers are /X/, as in *trabajo* or *geografía*, with /dʒ/ generally being the substitute and the use of /z/ rather than the sibilant /s/ in items such as *música*. The intrusion of the aspirate /h/, for example in /h/ermano and also of /i/ in words such as *m/i/úsica* and *Estados /i/unidos* present further problems as do incorrect stress patterns on individual words. Teachers are advised to alert candidates to the ambiguity caused, for example, when some future or preterite tense verb forms are incorrectly stressed. Clear pronunciation is frequently undermined where candidates are attempting to present material with which they are generally unfamiliar and, as such, resort to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

A small number of centres submitted inadequate recordings. Mostly the problem was caused by the tests being recorded at a very low volume such that the recording was virtually inaudible. In other cases, the teacher could be heard clearly but not the candidate. Please remember that teachers are used to projecting their voice and therefore are likely to be louder; the microphone should be positioned closer to the candidate and the sound level should be set according to the candidate's output.

Unit A723 Reading

General Comments:

We are grateful to centres for their work in preparing candidates for this unit. It is pleasing to report very minimal numbers of rubric errors or unanswered questions. In general, candidates appeared to have been appropriately entered at Foundation Tier with very small numbers of candidates scoring full or near full marks. At Higher Tier, all but a very small number of candidates were graded, which similarly indicates appropriate decisions made by teachers with regard to tier of entry.

As indicated in previous reports to centres, the current GCSE specification and the design of this paper require the inclusion of some elements of unfamiliar vocabulary not listed on the defined vocabulary content list published by OCR. Answers do not depend on knowledge of this vocabulary with the exception of two items which are tested one in each of Exercises 4 and 5 at Higher Tier. Centres may find it useful to draw future candidates' attention to this feature.

Candidates wrote clearly. We are grateful to centres for continuing to train candidates to cross out any notes or discarded answers carefully so as to avoid accidentally invalidating otherwise correct responses.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Foundation Tier A723/01

- Ex 1** This exercise targeted Grade G. All questions were answered well.
- Ex 2** This exercise targeted Grade F. Most candidates answered well, but '*corbata*' caused difficulties in Question 15, despite being part of typical school uniform and expected to be accessible at this grade. Centres are reminded in Reading too that they need to ensure candidates have a good knowledge of the published vocabulary list. This is particularly important in the earlier questions in the comprehension papers, where responses often depend on single items of vocabulary.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade E. Most candidates, however, found this challenging with only Questions 19 and 23 being consistently well answered and Question 18 causing the most challenge. Candidates were required to process a string of text to arrive at the answer and this proved hard for many. It is possible that '*digo*' was not well known and that this distracted candidates, but centres should prepare candidates to deal with familiar irregular verbs in the present tense at this grade level.
- Ex 4** This exercise targeted Grade D and as part of the paper design the level of demand increased. Candidates were required to process longer continuous text and very often the answers were embedded in the paragraph rather than at the beginning or end. The vocabulary was more complex and the conceptual level increased. The pattern of response across the exercise was similar for most questions in it. This evenness of response pattern indicates that the exercise differentiated effectively and consistently at this grade. Question 26 was answered a little less well and Question 30 a little better, but overall the differences were small.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade C. It was successful in differentiating at this level but Questions 33, 34 and 35 proved very challenging to Foundation Tier candidates. Centres are reminded that teaching of linguistic structures at this level should go beyond verb

forms and that other structures such as prepositions and object pronouns may also form part of assessment material at this grade.

Higher Tier A723/02

- Ex 1** This exercise targeted Grade D and was well answered by the majority of Higher Tier candidates. The pattern of responses was noticeably better than those of Foundation Tier candidates on the equivalent exercise and this is a further indication of candidates being entered at the correct tier.
- Ex 2** This exercise targeted Grade C and required candidates to process more language and understand gist as well as detail. This exercise was much better answered at this tier than by candidates on the equivalent exercise at Foundation Tier, but the comments at Foundation Tier about ensuring candidates are prepared to deal effectively with a wider range of linguistic structures than just tenses holds true here as well. Questions 10 and 11 caused the most difficulty and Questions 12 and 15 were relatively well answered.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade B. It was well answered by the majority of candidates and only Question 20 proved a little more challenging. The evenness of the response patterns indicates that the exercise differentiated well at this grade.
- Ex 4** This exercise targeted Grade A. As is to be expected, the level of vocabulary demand as well as linguistic processing rose to match the requirements of the published grade description for Grade A. Some unfamiliar vocabulary is tested in this exercise and pleasingly the word '*beca*' was known by about a quarter of the candidates at this tier, indicating that the more able candidates had been exposed to wide-ranging vocabulary items beyond the scope of the published list. Question 29 also presented difficulties. This exercise differentiated very effectively at its projected grade.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade A* and as is to be expected, challenged all but the most able candidates. Questions 34 and 39 proved a little more challenging than the rest, but overall the response pattern was quite even across the exercise. This exercise, in line with the comments made about unit A721/02, is designed to provide differentiation at the top end of candidature. The multiple choice items contain elements of distraction in the possible responses and the cognitive demand is increased by the requirement to process options in Spanish.

Unit A724 Writing

General Comments:

This year's entry saw candidates once again focusing on the popular topics of Holidays, My area, School, Work Experience, Free Time and Healthy Living. However, too often the pieces produced were formulaic and there was little attempt to differentiate task topics to cope with different levels of ability; in many cases, the nature of the task limited the most able candidates who did not have the scope to produce a truly personal response, whereas others found the task too demanding and were unable to produce the level of language which would have allowed them to express their ideas successfully. This was particularly true where imaginative tasks had been set; while the more able candidates were able to produce varied and successful pieces, others struggled to offer a coherent account.

While topics such as *mi barrio* or *mi instituto* do not alone give the more able candidates scope for producing a top level piece, they can be combined successfully with other topics such as The Environment in order to give the candidate an opportunity to develop more sophisticated ideas. This year, The Environment topic was successfully combined with both Local Area and Holidays; in addition, some good answers were found on the topic of School where the candidate compared the English and Spanish school systems. Answers on *la vida sana* allowed candidates to cover a range of topics such as sport, drug, food, alcohol and to express a wide range of opinions based on their personal experience; there was also evidence of wider knowledge of associated medical vocabulary, such as health conditions.

While more able candidates can do justice to tasks such as a letter of application for a job, a film review or writing an article about the environment, this type of task is generally too demanding for a weaker candidate who is therefore immediately at a disadvantage. It is recommended that centres should think carefully about the task given to the candidates to ensure that it meets their requirements and to differentiate tasks aimed at candidates of different abilities. In addition, centres are reminded of the need to adapt their controlled assessment tasks every two years, by changing at least one of the suggestions given to candidates on the Teachers Writing Information Forms (see page 18 of the Specification).

This year, candidates in some centres did produce some more innovative tasks: in one centre, candidates were asked to imagine that they were a celebrity and, besides offering factual information about life and family, were required to offer their opinions on topics such as racism, healthy living, terrorism and poverty. This led to some very successful pieces which seemed to appeal to candidates in this age range and it had also allowed them to research personalities across Spain and South America. Other successful tasks included writing an account of a celebration, such as a birthday, and, in one centre, candidates wrote a letter opposing the view that "all teenagers are lazy".

The most successful pieces are written when candidates are given a task which is appropriate for their ability and they are encouraged to produce an individual response. Most able candidates also respond well to having less direction on the Teachers Writing Information Form; detailed sub-tasks may have the effect of candidates producing similar pieces which appear to have been written to a template.

Some candidates are still writing at length, clearly aiming at the higher grades, irrespective of ability. Some pieces assessed were in excess of 500 words and it is noticeable that the quality of a piece deteriorates if it is over-long and the level of inaccuracy tends to increase; in addition, the content often becomes repetitive and no further credit can be given for a point that has already been made. Many of the more able candidates expressed themselves very successfully

and in a more concise way in pieces that did not exceed the recommended 300 words and still gained high marks.

In the language used, more successful candidates offered a wide range of appropriate vocabulary, a range of tenses (including the subjunctive) and clause types, a confident use of *cuando* with the subjunctive when referring to future events and a slightly improved use this year of the personal *a*, although this was not consistent across the candidature. Candidates are now using a wider range of clause types, introduced by such phrases as *así que...*, *puesto que...* and *dado que...* rather than the over-used *porque...*, which allows for more variety. However, less confident students tended to offer a more limited range of clause types and time frames and the language often lacked ambition and could not be rewarded in the higher bands.

Across all centres, common mistakes included omission of accents (*compro/compró*), thus making the message unclear, and a failure to agree adjectives.

Once again, candidates do not always appear capable of differentiating between straightforward and successful idiomatic use of language and the use of proverbs or sayings which, when scattered throughout a piece, give an unnatural feel to the piece, especially as these are often inappropriately used. This year, such expressions included: *es pan comido*, *Dios le ayuda*, *me aburro como una ostra* and others.

Errors of syntax (*me encanta voy al cine*), inaccuracy in spellings (despite the opportunity to use a dictionary), especially in the misuse of double consonants, a failure to connect sentences with *que* (*tengo un hermano se llama Joe*) and mistakes in elementary phrases (*mi gusta*, *mi llamo*) continue to be found across centres. There is also evidence that candidates who do have a dictionary do not really have an adequate knowledge of how to use it; several examples of this were found this year in expressions such as *yo testamento ir al cine* and *bebimos regar*.

Similarly, candidates continue to experience difficulties with *ser* and *estar* and candidates often fail to use an infinitive following a modal verb (*quiero voy...*, *puedo tengo...*).

However, there was some successful uses of *si* clauses with an imperfect subjunctive (*si pudiera, ...or si tuviera más tiempo libre...*) and many candidates used the conditional tenses successfully.

The biggest problem with the work produced in this Unit is that so many candidates are trying to reproduce language which they have tried to commit to memory without really understanding what they are writing. As a result, the piece they produce often fails to communicate a clear message as words are omitted or presented in the wrong order. The aim behind this Unit is that candidates should be encouraged to produce an individual response, not following a class template, using language that they are capable of manipulating, rather than reproducing phrases and structures which they have learnt without any real understanding of how the language works.

It is recommended that centres should focus on encouraging their candidates to produce a truly individual response using independently generated language.

Administration

Centres are reminded that the deadline for submission of work for this Unit is 15th May; this year, several Assessors reported that some work had arrived significantly after the deadline. The candidates' submissions should each have a correctly completed cover sheet (GCW939), the pieces should be arranged in the order shown on the cover sheet and held together with a treasury tag. Centres are asked not to use plastic wallets, paper clips or staples as these make the Assessor's task more onerous and time-consuming. The work submitted to the Assessor

must be the original and not a photocopy. The submissions should be sorted into candidate number order and should be sent with the CCS160 form (without which the centre is in breach of the Ofqual Code of Practice) and the attendance register. The omission of these documents can cause a delay in the submission of the marks to the Board.

It is important to remember that this is an **examined** unit and that teachers should not have marked the submissions in any way; there were again instances this year where the teacher had put marks not only on the scripts themselves but also on the cover-sheets, making the Assessor's task all the more difficult.

Centres are asked to check their candidates' use of the Writing Notes Form (Candidates) (GCW935) to ensure that it has been used appropriately; it should contain no more than forty individual words which serve as an *aide-mémoire* to the candidate. The words should not form a continuous piece of text which can be "lifted" into the final task, nor should it contain symbols or any type of code, as this would not be fulfilling the description of the use of the form as given in the Specification:

- *Notes should contain no more than 40 words: 5 bullet points with no more than 8 words per bullet point. This can include conjugated verbs.*

If a candidate elects not to complete the Writing Notes Form, a blank copy should be submitted with the work and signed by the candidate.

Similarly, it is the centre's responsibility, when selecting the tasks to be entered for each candidate, to ensure that the task written by the candidate is suitable for submission and does not contain any inappropriate or offensive material, in order to avoid a possible case of Malpractice (*JCQ Regulations : Instructions for conducting examinations 2014-15 Page 57 Appendix 5*).

We are grateful to the many centres whose scripts arrived on time, correctly packaged and with the appropriate documentation.

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