

GCSE

Spanish

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J732**

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

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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.

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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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CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Spanish (J732)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

Spanish Spoken Language (J032)

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)

Spanish Written Language (J132)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Content	Page
Unit A721 Listening	4
Unit A722 Speaking	6
Unit A723 Reading	8
Unit A724 Writing	10

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 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.
- Ex 2** This exercise targeted Grade F. Most candidates answered well and scored nearly full marks. Question 9 was the only item that caused difficulty, *albergue juvenil* not being well known. 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. Questions 19 and 20 caused the most difficulties. 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. They also had to write answers in English. Questions 26, 27 and 28 caused the most difficulties, *equitación* being confused with *educación* in many cases.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade C. It was successful in differentiating at this level and candidate performance declined fairly steadily through the exercise, as would be expected at Foundation Tier.

Higher Tier A721/02

- Ex 1** This exercise targeted Grade D. Most candidates scored well and yet the same issues with *equitación* being confused with *educación* arose in a number of cases.
- 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 opinions and points of view. Overall this exercise was well answered by most candidates at this tier, performance being noticeably stronger than in the equivalent exercise in the Foundation Tier paper.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade B. It was well answered but Questions 18 and 20 proved most challenging. 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 23 and 28 which were answered correctly by only a very small number of the most able candidates. Questions 21 and 24 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 sports psychology. 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 31b, 33 and 34 proved the most challenging. Question 32 was well answered. This exercise was 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. Some centres also opted for a role play with some interesting scenarios and exchanges. Few narrations were submitted. The most popular topic areas were, in order of preference, Holidays, Free Time, Self and Family, School, Healthy Lifestyle, Home and Local Area, and Work Experience. Only a few centres chose to explore the topic of the Environment.

The previously too-frequently-encountered tendency of teachers to allow candidates to speak uninterrupted at great length in the Presentation part of a Presentation and Discussion was less common in this series. Centres are reminded that such an approach leads to an unbalanced test, sometimes resulting in virtually a monologue and candidates then have insufficient time to develop the Discussion element of the task. As a result, candidates fail to 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.

As reported in previous years, 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. It was pleasing to listen to some tests where candidates had indeed developed individual responses. 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. A moderator presented with such tests obviously queries the degree of unpredictability of the questions.

In terms of Communication, 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. 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 were 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.

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 hindered comprehension, this had an impact on the Communication mark. The most common problems experienced were 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* presented further problems as did 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 attempt to present material with which they are generally unfamiliar and, as such, resort to reciting rather than delivering with any understanding.

The attention of centres is drawn to questioning technique. Closed questions are of very limited usefulness. They may be employed, for example, to re-focus a candidate who is struggling before the teacher reverts to open questions, but candidates cannot earn marks if they do not demonstrate use of the language themselves.

The timing of tests has improved gradually over the years. Candidates tend to tire (and teachers too) in over-long tests. If tests are substantially below the minimum requirement of four minutes, the Communication mark is likely to be impacted since less information has been conveyed. Furthermore, short tests can be self-penalising in terms of the Quality of Language mark since there is also less opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate the use of a range of structure and vocabulary. Centres are reminded that moderators are instructed to listen to six minutes' engagement only. This does not include the introductory and closing remarks and information given by the teacher.

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. On other occasions, the disc supplied to the moderator, when played, was blank. This was most likely due to the centre not 'finishing' it, i.e. not saving it such that it could be played on equipment other than that on which it was recorded. It is recommended that centres try to play their recordings on other machines before despatch.

We thank teachers and centres for their industry and efforts to comply with the regulations and also to supply moderators with accurate documentation in a timely fashion. Many centres this year furnished moderators with the preliminary requisites early in the moderation window or even prior to the deadline of 15 May.

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 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 with Question 12 the only item that caused difficulty. 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. The responses were consistent with the profile of candidates at this grade. Questions 20 and 21 proved the most challenging. Questions 18 and 23 were answered particularly well.
- 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 29 was answered a little less well and Questions 25 and 31 a little better, but overall the differences were small.
- Ex 5** This exercise targeted Grade C. It was successful in differentiating at this level with but Questions 34, 35 and 36 proved very challenging to Foundation Tier candidates. Question 33 was well answered.

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, with most candidates scoring full marks across the exercise. 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. Questions 10, 14 and 15 caused the most difficulty and Questions 9 and 13 were well answered.
- Ex 3** This exercise targeted Grade B. It was well answered by the majority of candidates and only Questions 19 and 20 proved 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 this level vocabulary demand as well as linguistic processing rises to match the requirements of the published grade description for Grade A. Some unfamiliar vocabulary is tested in this exercise. Questions 29 and 31 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. Question 34 was well answered as was Question 38. Question 40 proved the most difficult. 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. Candidates are advised to read all the questions carefully, looking for time markers, tenses etc. to help them locate answers in the text.

Unit A724 Writing

General Comments:

There were many similarities between the work produced this year and in past series, as could be expected in a Controlled Assessment Unit. Similar topics proved popular and many Centres produced successful pieces which showed flair and communicated well.

However, many of the same problems as in previous series are still occurring. There are still too many Centres who are encouraging candidates to write to a template thus producing stylised pieces, with more or less success depending on the ability of the candidates. Many candidates are attempting to learn their draft piece by heart but the less-able candidate finds it difficult to reproduce the piece accurately; this can be seen when candidate muddles the word order or divides words unnaturally, showing that they are not in control of the language that they are trying to reproduce. There were often inaccuracies in the verb endings and sentence structure, leading to a confused account which inevitably lowers the mark for communication if the message is unclear. Centres are advised to encourage candidates to produce a more individual response perhaps by offering less bullet points when setting the task; however, it is understandable that many candidates prefer to have the support of a suggested structure and this will, of course, lead to a similar framework for all the pieces from that Centre.

Candidates could be helped more by offering differentiated tasks. Straightforward tasks do not always allow the more talented candidates to fully express themselves and, similarly, more ambitious tasks can be too daunting for a weaker candidate. The most popular topics this year varied little from previous years; they included home town (sometimes including the environment), healthy lifestyle, a letter of application for a job or work experience, holidays, free time or school life. The topic of the environment can work well with more able candidates as it can generate opinion although some Assessors reported that this topic was dealt with in a more factual way thus limiting the opportunity for developing personal opinions; Centres are advised to guide their candidates to produce pieces that will allow them access to the higher bands in the mark scheme by offering their opinions to give a more personal response. Allowing candidates to choose topics that are of interest to them might lead to more creativity in the response; it was noted that, in one centre, candidates wrote about a holiday that went wrong which did allow a more personal and creative response.

The topic of healthy living can be effective if developed more widely to include consideration of social issues such as smoking, *botellón* and drug-taking thus allowing a candidate to offer an opinion on their own experiences and points of view. In this way, the piece can be further personalised by offering an interesting anecdote as to why the candidate holds these views. However, the piece ceases to be a truly personal response if each candidate in the Centre offers the same anecdote; it is recommended that teachers should encourage candidates to think for themselves and try to offer something that is truly unique to them. In one Centre, the candidates wrote about this topic as if they were a celebrity, thus producing some original responses.

However, the topic is much less likely to bring success if the candidate goes no further than offering lists of healthy and unhealthy foods that should or should not be eaten. Lists of vocabulary in this topic, or any other, do not help the candidate to achieve a better mark. This is often a problem in the topic of school life where the candidate will offer a list of subjects studied or sports in which they are involved, followed by their likes or dislikes of each one; this treatment of the topic is repetitive and does not advance the piece in terms of ideas expressed or structures used..

In the school topic, one Centre produced some successful pieces which compared the English and Spanish school systems and allowed preferences and opinions to be expressed.

Centres are also reminded of the suggested word count:

*Candidates aiming at grades g–d should produce between 100 and 175 words per task.
Candidates aiming at grades c–a* should produce between 200 and 300 words per task.*

If a candidate only produces a limited amount of language, it will inevitably mean that the communication mark will be lower because of the lack of material available to mark. However, candidates should also be encouraged not to write pieces that are over-long as this often leads to inaccuracies in the language (noticeable particularly in Centres where the candidates have tried to memorise the piece) and also repetition of content.

This year it was noticeable that many candidates expressed themselves well, using a varied vocabulary and a wide range of tenses including the perfect, pluperfect, present and imperfect subjunctives (although knowledge and use of the subjunctive is not expected at this level). There were also a range of connectives and clauses types including *así que...*, *puesto que...* and *dado que* and only a minority of candidates now limit themselves to the use exclusively of *porque...*; many candidates are also attempting to use verb forms other than the first person and to offer comparatives and superlatives to provide contrast.

In addition, it was reported that many more candidates are trying to use object pronouns, although not always linked when used with the infinitive (*quiere hacer lo*); the personal *a* seemed to be better understood and there was more successful use of present tense radical-changing verbs. Candidates also attempted include idiomatic language in their writing, including some more original uses (*cada muerte de obispo*), and there was less use of proverbial expressions which made the language more natural. However, the candidates in a Centre tended to all use the same idioms and it would be nice to see more variety across the entry.

However, some good work was spoiled by the lack of accents on verbs in the preterite or future tenses and Centres are advised of the need to stress the importance of the inclusion of these accents in order to convey a completely clear message. There were often basic spelling and agreement errors and many candidates limited their justifications to ... *porque es aburrido / divertido*, but with misspellings in these words (*abburido* is commonly found).

Another area of difficulty for many candidates was the use of *fui...*, *fue...* and *era...*, which were often misused or used repeatedly where a wider variety of vocabulary would have been beneficial. There was evidence of candidates writing *en* for *es* (often, possibly, as a result of incorrect learning and reproduction of language that is not completely understood), and also *mi* for *me*.

Centres are advised to dissuade candidates from using Google Translate which often produces directly translated language which is meaningless. In addition, candidates need to be trained in how to use a dictionary successfully as there is still a significant amount of evidence that this is not the case; this year, two examples found included *testamento* for will (*yo testamento ir*) and *diapositiva* for a playground slide.

Native speaker candidates need to be advised to develop their work and to offer opinions and justifications; they often do not write in enough detail. Students from Gibraltar often write phonetically and therefore cannot expect to achieve a high mark in the Quality of Language category; errors found included *ase* for *hace*, *e tao* for *he estado* and *ven paca* for *ven para acá*.

Administration

Many Centres are now complying with the Board's requirements, submitting the tasks using treasury tags, completing a Cover Sheet (GCW932) for each candidate and including the attendance register and CCS160 (Centre Authentication Form) in the package; the Assessors are grateful to these centres for their attention to detail.

However, there are still many who do not enclose the documentation and even fail to produce a Working Mark Sheet (GCW932) for each candidate, leaving the Assessor to have to generate these. Centres are reminded that, for each candidate, they are required to produce a Working Mark Sheet which should be attached to the two tasks that are being submitted together with the Candidate's Notes Form (GCW935) for each task; these should be signed by the candidate. There is no requirement for the Writing Information Form to be submitted to the Assessor.

Moreover, Centres should be reminded to check each piece of writing and Notes Form before they are submitted. Notes Forms should be monitored to ensure that the candidates are not attempting to misuse them: no symbols or attempt at the use of a code should be written on the Notes Form as this will be seen as an example of Malpractice and there should be no continuous prose which can be "lifted" into the piece. It was noted this year that many candidates elect not to use the Notes Form or include English words and/or mis-spellings; Centres are encouraged to train their candidates in the most effective way to use the Notes Form.

In addition, the Centre (and the teachers who have signed the CCS160 Form) are responsible for ensuring that the material sent is not in any way offensive to the Assessor by the use of any inappropriate (violent, racial or sexually explicit) content; such action is highlighted in the JCQ guidelines [*JCQ Regulations: Instructions for conducting examinations Page 57 Appendix 5*] as being examples of Malpractice. The Centre should also check that the pieces produced reflect the candidate's normal standard of work and the sessions when the controlled assessment is produced should be monitored to the same level as an examination session; it is important that the Centre can be assured that the candidates have no access to the Internet via mobile devices (tablets, mobile phones, Apple watches) and it is their responsibility to do so. There has been an alarming rise in the number of cases of Malpractice reported this year.

The team of Assessors is grateful to the majority of Centres which endeavour to deliver the work for this Unit correctly and who guide their candidates to produce interesting and varied pieces which are a pleasure to read.

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