



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **German 1661** *Specification*

**GER2T/V Speaking**

# **Report on the Examination** *2009 examination - June series*

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## Unit 2

### General comments

The first summer examination series of the new Unit 2 speaking test ran on the whole smoothly and most candidates coped well with the format of the test. Very few problems regarding accommodation and recording equipment at centres were reported by visiting examiners. With few exceptions, the recording quality of centre-conducted tests was satisfactory and teacher-examiners usually observed the guidelines concerning the timing of the test. Careful attention needs to be paid by centres to the accurate and full completion of STMS forms.

Most candidates were well prepared. There were many very good and some excellent performances reflecting the hard work and the enthusiasm with which candidates had approached the subject during the year. Examiners commented that the majority of candidates displayed sufficient or in some cases very impressive knowledge of vocabulary that enabled them to talk about all four topics and to communicate both facts and opinions. Many students were able to respond to the examiner's questions with a degree of spontaneity. However, many tests conducted by teachers followed an apparently rehearsed pattern of questions and answers and candidates were often allowed to produce large amounts of pre-learnt material in both parts of the test. In order to secure comparability with tests conducted by visiting examiners and also to allow candidates to score highly on Interaction it is important that teacher-examiners regularly include unpredicted questions and encourage the spontaneous development of thoughts.

Visiting examiners normally try to 'stretch' candidates in order to establish their linguistic ceiling and many weaker candidates rise to this challenge and often surprise themselves by how well they were able to respond to more 'difficult' questions. Therefore, teacher examiners who keep the exchange at GCSE level do no service to their candidates. Mixing personal or 'easy' questions with more demanding ones is a good strategy to ensure that candidates perform at their best.

While visiting examiners usually address candidates with the formal *Sie* (unless asked to do otherwise) teacher-examiners are of course free to use *du* with their students. Having decided to do so, they should then be consistent in using only one form of address throughout the test and also change the printed questions on the stimulus cards accordingly.

### Part 1: Stimulus Card

Most candidates responded well to the stimulus material. The 10 marks available are awarded in equal parts for the candidate's response to the stimulus itself i.e. answering the printed questions and for the ensuing wider discussion. The time given to either section should therefore be as evenly balanced as possible and it was pleasing to see that this was often achieved. Many candidates used their preparation time to formulate full and developed responses. It is anticipated that the first question will still prompt a fairly brief answer but thereafter each question should be seen as an opportunity for candidates to develop as many relevant points as possible. There is a significant difference between making a point and developing a point and a candidate will only access the highest mark in the first part if he/she uses the questions to sustain a conversation for approximately two and a half minutes. The candidate who gives only the briefest of responses to the printed questions will achieve only a low score. It is essential, therefore, that candidates are well practised in maximising their use of preparation time so that they can respond as necessary. There is no opportunity for the examiner to 'draw out' more from the candidate in this section as the mark out of 5 is based on the response to the printed questions. Candidates should also be discouraged from giving detailed descriptions of what is on the stimulus card. Candidates should bear in mind that everything presented on the card – including images, titles and captions – is meant to serve as a possible cue for conveying relevant information and can be used for developing points and expressing opinions.

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All six stimulus cards proved to be accessible to candidates. The different types of questions on each card often served as an effective discriminator between average and good candidates. In many cases, candidates successfully conveyed statistical information contained in the stimulus by describing and summarising trends, increases or decreases rather than just reading out numbers or percentages.

The wider discussion that follows must remain within the stated subtopic area and almost all teacher- examiners complied with this rule. Ideally, this discussion develops naturally from the content of the stimulus material and the candidate's responses to the prescribed questions. Crucially, candidates should be given opportunities to clarify or expand on earlier contributions as well as being invited to talk about other aspects of the subtopic. Unfortunately, in some centre-conducted tests students were allowed to enter into a rehearsed exchange on the subtopic as soon as the five questions had been answered. As a consequence, the discussion often veered quite considerably from the focus of the stimulus card.

### **Karte A: Das Internet – Bibliothek der Zukunft?**

Most candidates related well to the subject matter although not all could cope with the second question about the significance of books; *Bedeutung* and even *seit Hunderten von Jahren* seemed to cause some comprehension problems. The dangers of chat rooms for young people was the most frequently named disadvantage of the internet but only few candidates took the word *zuverlässig* in one of the captions as a cue and focussed on the reliability of information obtained from the internet..

### **Karte B: Karriere statt Kinder**

This card produced mixed results. When answering the second question, some candidates read out the text underneath the statistics verbatim without adding anything of their own as development. Questions 3 and 4 drew many varied responses. The provision of pensions was very rarely mentioned as a future problem for a society with an aging population; but the majority of candidates offered a range of meaningful answers, for instance referring to difficulties in the job market and to concerns about the care of old people. The verb *unterstützen* was obviously not widely known and this probably accounts for the fact that candidates' suggestions how best to support families were often rather vague. Very few candidates pointed out the importance of childcare provision for working parents or the need for more flexible working hours.

### **Karte C: Lieber gesund als süß**

This was a popular choice and generally handled well. Some candidates had difficulties with relating the information contained in the statistics without quoting too many percentage figures. Not many candidates speculated on possible reasons for the decrease in the popularity of sweet drinks, but answers to Question 4 were often full and extended. Question 5 usually led seamlessly into to a wider discussion of dietary habits and most candidates had a lot to say about this issue. It was therefore disappointing that teacher-examiners often did not explore it more thoroughly but digressed from the focus of the stimulus too soon in order to discuss other health issues like smoking, drugs or stress.

### **Karte D: Mode-Druck im Klassenzimmer**

This was also a popular card and a subject on which candidates often had strong views. However, many candidates had apparently not fully understood the connection between the planned introduction of school uniforms in Germany and the pressure on German pupils to wear designer clothes, despite this being stated clearly on the stimulus card. Question 3 was almost universally misinterpreted because of *solche* being generally unknown and *soll* being confused with *sollte*. As a result, most candidates expressed their own views on what a school uniform

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should look like rather than referring to the situation in German schools. In such cases, it is good practice for examiners to return to the issue during the wider discussion with a differently phrased question in order to elicit the desired information. Regrettably, this rarely happened in centre-conducted tests. Most candidates were outspoken on the subject of fashion with a fairly equal division between those young people who 'admitted' to loving designer labels and buying them regularly and those candidates who found the subject irrelevant and who – as one examiner quoted – considered *'innere Schönheit'* to be more important than outer appearance.

### **Karte E: Muss Werbung sein?**

This card was slightly less popular, but most candidates who chose it dealt with it well. There were few problems with conveying the statistical information from the simple diagram, but some candidates had difficulty in finding possible reasons for the viewers' opinions about adverts. Candidates who generally disliked adverts on TV outnumbered those expressing more favourable views. Most candidates expressed opinions on a restriction or ban of certain adverts (alcohol, tobacco etc.), but examiners reported that only very few candidates were able to describe a TV or cinema advert they found either appealing or terrible.

### **Karte F: Der neue Trend - Urlaub im eigenen Land**

This was a popular card and mostly handled successfully. Occasionally, the second part of Question 2 (*Finden Sie das überraschend?*) was ignored by both candidates and examiners. Such composite questions should help candidates to prepare answers which go beyond the minimum information as presented on the card. Naturally, answers to Question 4 depended to some extent on candidates' general or indeed geographical knowledge. The vicinity of Eastern European countries to Germany or their potential for a cheaper holiday did not feature in most candidates' answers but other valuable reasons for the popularity of these countries were usually given such as lovely countryside, interesting towns and hot weather. Some examiners marking centre-conducted tests observed that with this card, the wider discussion sometimes remained at GCSE level ('What did you do / what do like to do in your holiday?'). Successful exchanges went beyond personal experiences and addressed general aspects of the subtopic e.g. mass tourism.

## **Part 2: Conversation**

The great majority of candidates seemed to be genuinely interested in the topics they had studied. Nominating one topic or sub-topic for the first part of the conversation is meant to give greater initial control to candidates and in general they clearly benefited from this. Visiting examiners found that in virtually all centres candidates' prompt cards complied with the guidelines and were a helpful tool for both examiners and candidates. Teacher-examiners are reminded that this first topic is to be treated as an integral part of the conversation and by no means as an opportunity for the candidate to prepare and deliver a mini-presentation. The examiner needs to start the exchange with an appropriate question; invitations to the candidate like *'Was können Sie mir darüber sagen?'* should be avoided.

The guidelines stipulate that each of the three topics should be allocated roughly equal time i.e. 3 to 3 ½ minutes and most teacher-examiners adhered to this rule. But it is not necessary to reset the stop watch at the start of each topic so that the conversation is punctuated by frequent bleeps from the timing device. While making smooth transitions between topics is a sign of good examining skills it is also important that such transitions are clearly indicated by the examiner. This is helpful to both candidates and to examiners marking centre-conducted tests.

The great majority of candidates were eager to communicate and none of the topics or subtopics could be regarded as being 'easier' or 'more difficult' than others. There is usually not sufficient time during the 10 minute conversation to cover every single one of the nine sub-topics available, especially if the examiner aims for the development of points through follow-up

questions. But some teacher-examiners deemed it necessary to address all sub-topics; they often asked just one or two questions on each (sometimes taken almost exclusively from the published list of suggested questions) before moving on to the next subtopic. As a consequence, the exchange remained at a rather superficial level. It is by far the better approach to discuss just one or two subtopics within a topic area in more depth. This may also ensure that all candidates are at times given the opportunity to react spontaneously and thereby the chance to access higher marks for Interaction. The 'suggested questions' are by no means prescriptive and should be treated as 'starter questions' highlighting a few aspects of each subtopic. It is incumbent on both visiting examiners and on teachers conducting their own tests to prepare additional questions. But it is equally important during the conduct of the test to follow up on candidates' responses and to keep lines of questioning flexible.

A candidate who spends less than 2 minutes on any topic in Part 2 will have their mark for Interaction reduced by one band, eg a candidate who is judged at 8 marks would have the mark reduced to 6. A candidate judged at 9 marks would have their mark reduced to 7. This same ruling will apply to candidates who do not meet the requirement of the specification for the test to cover all four AS topics. This may occur if the teacher-examiner covers a topic in Part 2 which has already been covered in Part 1.

Most candidates spoke with an acceptable level of fluency and with good or satisfactory pronunciation. Only few candidates were awarded marks below 3 for the latter. Typical weaknesses existed in the production of *z*, *ch* and the *Umlaute*. Common mispronunciations reported by examiners included *doof*, *Idee* (angl.) and *Fuschball*; differentiating between the vowel sounds of *Scheidung* and *geschieden* regularly caused problems (*Schiedung*, *gescheiden*).

#### **Overall knowledge of grammar and vocabulary:**

Examiners expressed general praise about candidates' secure knowledge of relevant vocabulary. Common errors were the confusion between *Übergewicht* and *übergewichtig*, *Gesundheit* and *gesund*, *eigen*, *einige* and *einzig*, *interessant* and *interessiert* as well as *schlank* and *schlimm*. Wrong use of *seit* and *vor* sometimes caused difficulties for clear communication and anglicisms like *ich hoffe so/ ich denke so* were widely used. Given that every candidate had studied 'Television' and 'Computer technology' during the year it was surprising how many talked about watching something '*im Fern*' and sitting '*auf dem Computer*'.

There was a wide spectrum in candidates' grammatical performance, but incidents where grammatical errors impeded on communication were comparatively rare. Many candidates attempted complex structures successfully, although not always with consistently enough accuracy to be awarded marks in the top band. Even very able candidates did often not succeed with constructing infinitive clauses accurately. In basic structures, mistakes in word order also abounded, such as failure to observe inversion of verb and subject or the widespread tendency to place the verb at the end of *und*- and *aber*-clauses. Placing adverbs between subject and verb was also a common error (e.g. *Ich auch mag....*). Examiners found that many candidates had significant weaknesses in the conjugation of verbs and that knowledge of past tenses was often rather insecure.

## **IMPORTANT INFORMATION**

The *Instructions for the Conduct of the Examinations* state that approximately 3 minutes must be allocated to each of the three topics to be covered in Part 2. For a candidate who spends less than 2 minutes on any topic in Part 2, the mark for Interaction is reduced by one band, eg a candidate who is judged at 8 marks has the mark reduced to 6. A candidate judged at 9 marks has their mark reduced to 7. This same ruling applies to candidates who do not meet the requirement of the specification for the test to cover all four AS topics. This may occur if the teacher-examiner covers a topic in Part 2 which has already been covered in Part 1.

Teachers conducting their own tests have to be very familiar indeed with the full range of topics and sub-topics in the specification and particularly with which sub-topic belongs under which topic heading. Confusion over this will result in a lack of coverage of all of the topic areas and will reduce a candidate's overall mark in the speaking test. If a teacher-examiner mistakenly treats Holidays as an aspect of Popular Culture, for example, then the Healthy Living topic is likely to be covered twice and the Popular Culture topic not at all.

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2009 covering both Unit 2 and Unit 4. These meetings will be full day meetings and free of charge. Further details can be obtained from the AQA website in due course.

### **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.