



## **General Certificate of Education**

# **German 2661** *Specification*

**GER4T/V Speaking**

# **Report on the Examination**

*2010 examination - June series*

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## Unit 4

### General comments

Visiting examiners generally expressed their satisfaction with the accommodation and the support provided by centres. Invigilators and chaperones were usually in place and staff at schools and colleges must be thanked for playing their part in making the examination run smoothly.

Examiners' reports on the use of AQA Audio recorder were largely positive, but inevitably there were some teething problems. These often arose from wrongly set bit rates, from unsuitable microphones and from screensavers not having been deactivated. Most centres had followed minutely the instructions issued by AQA for setting up and testing the equipment before the arrival of the examiner and had ensured that technical support was available throughout the session. Unfortunately, there were also a few centres where the technical preparation and support were unsatisfactory thus causing unnecessary stress to the examiner and diverting his/her full attention away from the conduct of the tests.

Centre-conducted tests were recorded on a range of media, but a greater proportion than last year was submitted on CDs and memory sticks. Recordings in digital format are now considered to be preferable due to their superior sound quality and their general ease of use, but centres should make sure that volume levels are set at a sufficiently high rate and that tracks are clearly labelled.

Both visiting and teacher-examiners generally adjusted well to the format and demands of the new examination and it was pleasing to note that the vast majority of teachers followed the guidelines and instructions with great care. Candidates were on the whole well-prepared and many examiners commented positively on the enthusiasm with which the young people approached the test and on their readiness to communicate their ideas.

Accurate time-keeping needs to be improved in several centres and some concerns about the general conduct of the test need to be addressed. Not all teacher-examiners provided enough opportunities for their candidates to develop ideas spontaneously and to offer and defend opinions and personal views. The topics in both parts of this test may often be complex and wide-ranging but examiners should at all times strive to keep questions and prompts as brief and precise as possible and to avoid over-participation.

### Part 1: Discussion of Stimulus Cards

This part of the test was undoubtedly approached with some degree of apprehension by students, teachers and visiting examiners alike. But the general impression of how candidates coped with the task was a positive one: most candidates entered into the 'spirit' of the exercise with a genuine eagerness to explain and to defend one of the viewpoints on offer. The great majority did not appear to get intimidated by the examiner putting forward opposite views or disagreeing with them outright. It was also pleasing to see that the majority of examiners – whether external or internal – handled the tasks skilfully and without becoming unnecessarily confrontational or even threatening. Challenges can be expressed in many different ways; asking candidates for a more detailed explanation and for examples, inviting them to consider different views or to speculate on possible consequences - all these can be valuable strategies for the conduct of the task.

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Clearly, a lot of work had been done in centres to prepare candidates for this task and examiners reported that many stimulating debates between examiners and candidates took place. Most candidates listened well to their 'opponent' and were ready to admit to other points of view being valid ones while still continuing to defend their own stance. Appropriate phrases like '*Ich stimme Ihnen/dir zu*', '*Ich bin anderer Meinung*' were widely used and relevant vocabulary for the topic areas was generally well-known.

Initial presentations from candidates differed widely both in length and quality. It clearly requires thorough practice to summarise the chosen viewpoint clearly and succinctly within approximately one minute. Candidates need to look at the content of the chosen speech bubble carefully in order to compose their talk around this particular aspect of the sub-topic. Unfortunately, many candidates filled their presentation with general statements about the topic or sub-topic that had little relevance with the actual opinion introduced in the speech bubble. The mark scheme refers to the 'development of relevant points'; therefore, presentations as described above cannot attract high marks. On the other hand, examiners listened to some impressive talks where candidates used the text in their chosen speech bubble effectively as the starting point for outlining a number of relevant points in support of the favoured *Meinung*.

Very short presentations i.e. lasting below 40 seconds are unlikely to score highly but candidates who take well over one minute to present their views also put themselves at a disadvantage as less time will be available for the discussion. It is important that examiners politely interrupt candidates who go on for too long.

Each stimulus card deals with one of the sub-topics on the specification. In contrast to Unit 2, examiners are not strictly obliged to keep the discussion solely within this subtopic; it may sometimes be unavoidable to digress into adjacent sub-topics during the discussion especially where the dividing lines between the sub-topics are quite subtle. Nevertheless, the examiner should try to re-direct the discussion as much as possible towards the issue in question; in numerous tests the focus on the stimulus card was lost for the greater part of the discussion.

The examiner needs to develop the discussion guided by the candidate's initial thoughts and by his/her responses while also introducing new arguments at the right moment in order to move the debate on. Some teacher-examiners opted for moving quickly from one counter-argument to the next without developing the current point of discussion. The notes in the examiner's booklet should only serve as a guide to what aspects can be brought into the debate; they are not intended to be used exclusively and in their entirety or - worst of all - verbatim as happened in a few centres. But it was pleasing to see that many more teacher-examiners appropriately incorporated the 'bullet points' into the discussion.

None of the cards appeared to be either particularly difficult or easy and examiners noticed that candidates were by and large familiar with the vocabulary in the speech bubbles. Not surprisingly, Card C dealing with the complex issue of gene technology was by far the least favourite card while the remaining five cards were more or less equal in popularity.

Although a clear overlap between the content of the cards and the topics for discussion in Part 2 is less likely at Unit 4 than it is at Unit 2 examiners should nevertheless avoid handing out a card which has a link to one or both of the candidate's Cultural Topics e.g. Card D (*Atomkraft*) and *Die Wolke*.

All teacher-examiners announced the candidate's choice of card at the start of the test but frequently the examiner marking the test was left wondering which *Meinung* the candidate was supporting. Teachers are therefore advised to indicate this at the beginning in order to make it easier for examiners to form an immediate impression of the candidate's short presentation.

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**Card A: *Das Auto – Freund oder Feind?***

At first glance, this was a very approachable subject and close to the heart of many young people – whether car drivers themselves or not. It was interesting to see that candidates were very much divided in their choice of viewpoint with a slight majority speaking up for the essential role of cars in our lives. However, candidates who chose *Meinung 1* frequently failed to see that this did not argue for cars to become more expensive but to raise the cost of driving itself. Very few candidates mentioned higher taxes, petrol prices, road pricing etc. as a possible means of reducing car use while many candidates used their initial presentation to talk in very general terms about environmental problems and the importance of acting 'green'; while without doubt being valid opinions they were in this case not relevant to the content of the stimulus.

**Card B: *Wie bekämpfen wir Rassismus?***

This topic frequently elicited very personal, even emotional reactions from students. The majority of candidates who chose this card supported *Meinung 2* and many lucid arguments against a blanket ban of right-wing groups were brought into the discussion. Some candidates emphatically expressed their dislike of racist attitudes and their belief in a multi-cultural society but as a consequence got side-tracked from the actual issue i.e. the best way to fight racism. Very few candidates were able to distinguish accurately between *verbieten*, *verboten* and *Verbot*.

**Card C: *Ist Gentechnik die Antwort?***

As mentioned above, this card was not a favourite choice, probably because questions of science are generally regarded as being difficult. Among those candidates who chose this card, *Meinung 1* was – surprisingly perhaps – by far the more popular one. Despite the perceived difficulty of the subject, most candidates argued well in defence of the chosen statement and often contributed to a stimulating debate on this contentious issue.

**Card D: *Atomkraft – ja oder nein?***

It was interesting to see that candidates who argued against nuclear power were outnumbered by those who spoke for the continued and increased use of nuclear energy. This subject contains many contentious aspects that could be explored including of course the role of renewable energies. Unfortunately, quite a few discussions almost entirely revolved around wind and solar power.

**Card E: *Brauchen wir Einwanderer?***

Most candidates supported the concept of immigration for economic reasons but only the more able candidates effectively countered examiners' arguments about low-paid jobs or the need for highly qualified immigrants. Many presentations and subsequent discussions veered away from the question posed by the card and focussed instead on matters of integration and cultural diversity.

**Card F: *Verstehen oder bestrafen?***

Examiners reported that there were many excellent discussions about this issue. The majority of candidates pleaded for helping young offenders in the community and many offered rational arguments against prison sentences. But most of those candidates who chose *Meinung 1* were also able to support with eloquence the need for and perceived benefits of custodial sentences.

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## Conversation on Cultural Topics

Students had studied a wide range of topics although painters, musicians or architects featured quite rarely. Teachers must ensure that the choice of topics complies with the regulations in the specification and that the two topics are taken from different areas of study.

Examiners were on the whole impressed by the degree of knowledge and enthusiasm shown by candidates and many expressed their pleasure at either participating in or listening to discussions of a high quality. There were candidates who voiced critical opinions or outright dislike of a book or film they had studied but such views could also create some interesting exchanges. In most centres, candidates were equally well prepared for both topics.

It is vital that the discussion is fairly equally divided between the two cultural topics. Teachers are reminded that failure to devote at minimum of four minutes to one topic (within the entire testing time of 15 minutes) will result in a deduction of interaction marks by one band. The majority of teacher-examiners showed good time-management; but there were a significant number of centres where candidates were disadvantaged because one topic did not receive sufficient discussion time.

For candidates to achieve higher marks they have to be able to express and also to defend their opinions. Many teacher-examiners regularly opened up such opportunities to their candidates through the use of imaginative and varied questions and by developing points directly from the candidate's responses. However, in many centres teachers predominantly asked questions about facts or storylines and often allowed candidates to give extended monologues. Questions like '*Worum geht es in diesem Buch/Film?*', '*Was ist in dieser Zeit passiert?*' or '*Was können Sie mir über....erzählen?*' should be avoided and generous time be given to finding out about the candidate's reactions and opinions as well as challenging these where appropriate. Even when discussing historical or geographical topics it is possible to incorporate questions and prompts to this effect, for instance by asking about the significance and relevance of certain events for today, by questioning people's motives and actions or by inviting students to speculate about alternative outcomes or future developments. A few teachers deprived their candidates of valuable time by offering their own opinions at length, by rephrasing what the candidate had just said or by asking rather longwinded questions.

As expected, in most centres all or most candidates had studied the same two topics. The temptation therefore existed to ask every candidate identical questions or at least to concentrate on identical aspects. Teachers who follow this approach do their candidates a disservice. Not only can the impression arise that a pre-set and rehearsed list of questions is used but candidates are also unlikely to be given enough opportunities to develop their ideas spontaneously and become eligible for higher interaction marks.

Geographical topics featured much less frequently than historical ones; post-war Germany, the GDR and *Die Wende* were the most popular periods studied. Most candidates appeared to have developed a good understanding of historical events, their causes and possible significance for today. But examiners also observed that in many candidates' minds some rather simplistic ideas prevailed, for instance about life in the GDR (*keine Arbeitslosigkeit*) or about the '*Ossi/ Wessi*' phenomenon. Similarly, candidates who had studied a geographical region often had only superficial knowledge which was limited to important towns, tourist attractions or a few historical facts, but that they could offer little of substance about the social, economic or cultural situation in the region or about prospects for the future.

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Among literature topics, the most frequent choices were the plays and novels by Dürrenmatt, Frisch's *Andorra*, Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and König's *Ich fühl mich so fifty/fifty* while *Das Leben der Anderen* and *Goodbye Lenin* topped the 'film chart'. Clearly, the majority of candidates had enjoyed reading a longer German text and/or watching a film in German and many were able to communicate this in lively and interesting conversations. At some centres, candidates had also learnt something about the life of the author or film director and felt that this knowledge could further their understanding of a book or film. But it must be stressed that authors' biographies are not an obligatory element of study and that visiting examiners would only have explored this aspect if appropriate.

Examiners reported that the quality of pronunciation was generally satisfactory or good; there were some very impressive performances and relatively few instances where immediate communication was not established due to bad pronunciation. But it must be said that many candidates including able ones still failed to attempt authentic German *r*-, *ch*- and *z*-sounds. Individual mispronunciations included *kömis*ch, *Indus*chtrie, English pronunciation of *Situation* as well as *Regierung* pronounced with a soft *g*. Given how often *Die Wende*, *Ich fühl' mich so fifty/fifty* and *Das Leben der Anderen* featured as Cultural Topics it was surprising to witness widespread ignorance among candidates of the accurate pronunciation of *DDR*, *BRD* (also often wrongly called *BDR*), *Regisseur* and *Sabine*.

### **Knowledge of Grammar**

A wide range of proficiency among candidates existed, but grammatical shortcomings only rarely led to genuine difficulties in communication. Examiners observed that candidates generally had a good range of vocabulary at their disposal, but that the use of idiomatic language was fairly limited. Complex clauses including conditional phrases and passive constructions were regularly attempted and with varying success. Consistently accurate word order often proved to be a challenge, both in complex and in simple clauses. Disappointingly many candidates were in the habit of placing the verb at the end of main clauses beginning with *und*, *aber*, *dann* and similar conjunctions. The appropriate and accurate use of past tenses was also an area of concern. Many candidates seemed unaware that talking about historical events requires the continuous use of many more past tense verb forms than *war* and *hatte*. Sentences such as '*In der DDR können die Leute nicht ....*' or '*Damals gibt es ....*' occurred with regularity. While examiners did not often feel able to award marks in the highest band of 13 -15 they also reported that relatively few candidates had to be given very low grammar marks.

### **Annual Teacher Support Meetings**

Centres are reminded that language-specific Teacher Support Meetings for the Conduct of the Speaking Tests will be held in Autumn 2010 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 ([www.aqa.org.uk](http://www.aqa.org.uk)) 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.

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