



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2013**

German

GER2T

(Specification 2660)

Unit 2: Speaking Test

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

In line with previous examination series in January, the overall standard of performance was good; a number of students displayed an excellent level of proficiency. Once again there was a high proportion of native speakers and many students re-sat the test. Few students received marks in the very low band of the mark range.

Only a few schools and colleges recorded their tests on cassette tapes; these were invariably old and of a rather poor sound quality with obtrusive noises often marring the clarity of voices. The majority of CDs and USB devices used by schools and colleges were of good sound quality although occasionally, recording levels for both teacher and student had not been checked sufficiently which usually resulted in the student's voice being much less audible than the teacher's. On most CDs and USB devices, tracks had been labelled electronically in accordance with instructions but in some cases examiners had difficulty in identifying students quickly. Furthermore, teachers who examine students from a consortium of schools must ensure they use separate CDs or sticks for each school.

Examiners were generally pleased about good time management in the tests. However, a small number of teachers spent up to 6 minutes on Part 1 which often led to the entire test exceeding the prescribed time by up to 2 minutes. This inevitably caused problems with regard to the minimum time (2 minutes) required for each conversation topic since examiners stop marking at 15 minutes. Teachers are reminded not to re-set timing devices between Parts 1 and 2 in order to ensure their timing is compatible with the marker's stop-watch.

There were many examples of good examining technique where teachers regularly followed up the student's utterances, thus enabling him or her to develop points and ideas with a degree of spontaneity while avoiding the impression of over-reliance on pre-learnt material. More able students in particular are best served by being given frequent opportunities to react 'on their feet' as well as making use of their careful preparation.

Part 1: Discussion of a Stimulus Card

All cards were accessible and students had virtually no problems with understanding the language in the stimulus and in the printed questions. As usual some cards were discussed more frequently than others; the fact that many students offered 'Popular Culture' as their nominated topic resulted in Cards D and E being discussed much less often.

It is now a well-established practice among teacher-examiners that the five questions must be asked without any supplementary questions (unless an unsatisfactory first answer makes this necessary). Hardly any teachers deviated from this practice and most teachers also adhered to the respective sub-topic during the discussion. However, examiners again heard many discussions which bore very little or no relation to the subject of the stimulus. Teachers are reminded that the discussion should, as far as possible, arise naturally from one or two aspects of the stimulus and the student's answers, so that these and other relevant aspects of the sub-topic can be explored and developed further. Too many teachers made no attempt to follow these guidelines and instead asked questions about entirely unrelated matters.

Many students used the various stimuli on the card well when formulating their answers but some students limited their own input by lifting much or all of the information from the card without appropriate rephrasing. Examiners also commented on a widespread reluctance to go beyond brief answers in the first two or three printed questions where too many students were unable to add reasons, examples or opinions. For a maximum mark, a wide range of relevant points need to be developed and students who gave sparse answers at first and then very lengthy responses on Questions 4 and 5 were unlikely to achieve this. By contrast,

in some tests the prepared answers took so long (over 3 minutes) that insufficient time remained for the discussion, with students failing to access very high marks for this section.

Karte A (*Handy-Sprache*)

This was generally handled well although many students did not develop their answers enough. Insufficient use was usually made of the examples of abbreviations as very few students expressed any personal reaction to these curious combinations of characters. In Question 3 the wording *Aus welchen Gründen* should have prompted students to think about more than just one possible reason for the popularity of English and not limiting these - as happened frequently - to English being 'cool' among young Germans. In contrast, a number of good ideas were expressed regarding the possible consequences of using SMS language.

Karte B (*Die neuen Stars*)

The second card on Media was chosen infrequently but students coped well with it. In their answer to Question 2 some students were unable to convert *Hoffnung* and *Traum* into suitable sentences but Questions 3 and 4 elicited some good contributions about the popularity of talent shows and possible effects on their participants. Discussions mostly followed the usual, often predictable pattern of personal and more general questions about the role of television, a topic on which all students had a lot to say.

Karte C (*Umsteigen auf das Fahrrad*)

This was a very popular card providing a breadth of accessible material and information. However, more efforts could often have been made to offer more comprehensive answers to Question 2; many students simply cited increased fitness levels, avoidance of traffic and reduced cost without adding reasons, examples or opinions. Surprisingly few students included the environmental benefits of cycling. Question 3, on the other hand, produced more extended responses and a variety of ideas. The last question tempted many students to focus more on a healthy diet than exercise; aspects of healthy living were also often pursued by the teacher so that part of the discussion was conducted outside the sub-topic on the stimulus.

Karte D (*Rock im Sommer*)

Not many students chose this card and examiners noticed that answers to the questions were often a little unimaginative. Hardly anybody took up the cue of *'bei jedem Wetter'* to say something about people wading through mud at such events. Alcohol and drug use were always pointed out as potential problems but many students were unable to add their own view as required by the printed question. Discussions usually followed familiar threads of personal preferences or dislikes of various musical genres as well as the way young people obtain music nowadays.

Karte E (*Ja zur Ökomode!*)

Few students chose this card but those who did acquitted themselves well. It seems that environmental issues in the world of fashion are often part of classroom teaching; this, as well as the comparatively large amount of information on the card, contributed to success in answering the questions. Answers to Question 4 were often rather brief but mostly contained good reasoning about the future growth or otherwise of 'eco fashion'. In the Discussion, teachers provided opportunities for students to talk about shopping habits, fashion labels and second hand shops.

Karte F (*Die Ein-Kind-Familie*)

This popular card was handled with confidence by most students who chose it. Aspects of family life are very familiar elements in the teaching of German AS level which perhaps accounts for the fact that contributions were often quite predictable and contained much pre-learned material. The statistical table on the card was easy to understand and to put into words but students' answers often lacked interpretation. The range of reasons given for the increase in one-child-families was often disappointingly narrow; lack of time and financial pressures were most often quoted whereas women's career choices and deferred childbearing featured rarely. When weighing up the pros and cons of having siblings, many students based their responses on their own situation but they could often have made more creative use of the content of both speech bubbles.

Part 2: Conversation

The Conversation topics are well established and examiners were pleased to report that very few infringements occurred regarding the prescribed coverage of topics. Discussing their nominated topic gives most students a confident start to the test as the line of questioning is more or less predictable. Nevertheless, teachers should avoid, as much as possible, allowing students to merely adhere to a pre-learned script and should strive to instil an element of spontaneity into this part of the Conversation. In some instances, students were still allowed to deliver lengthy speeches without any attempt by the teacher-examiner to follow up what was said. It must be reiterated that not all bullet points on a student's prompt card have to be addressed. Furthermore, time should be evenly distributed between the three conversation topics without devoting extended time to the nominated topic. Examiners listened to many tests where the nominated topic took 5 to 6 minutes.

The discussion of the two remaining topic areas should also focus on just one or at the most two sub-topics in order to achieve a more in-depth exploration and, if possible, spontaneous development of points. The majority of teachers followed this guideline and examiners commented favourably on many cases of skilful and responsive examining. There were still a few centres where the teacher-examiner used a rigid list of unconnected questions often allowing monologue-type answers and giving few, if any, opportunities for more spontaneous interaction.

Employing good question techniques had a positive effect on the general performance of students. Marks for Interaction mainly ranged from 7 upwards indicating that students had generally prepared well for the test and that most were keen to express their views and experiences.

Fluency was generally good so that as in previous series, marks below 6 were rare. Equally, marks for pronunciation were predominantly awarded in the two upper bands. Areas of weaknesses were once again *v*, *z* and *ch* consonants and a few students had not made any serious effort to abandon their heavy English *r* and *l* sounds. Individual mispronunciations rarely made comprehension difficult but examiners pointed out the widespread use of *Famili* (Angl.), *Elten* instead of *Eltern*, *ie/ei* confusion such as in *Lied* or *geblieben* and the common (English) mispronunciation of *DVD*.

Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary

The majority of grammatical marks were again awarded in the 10-12 band. Regular use of more sophisticated vocabulary and more demanding structures ensured a score in the highest band but on the whole, the proportion of top grammar marks was not as high as hoped for. In most cases, grammatical inaccuracies did not adversely affect communication but examiners commented on persistent shortcomings in basic grammar. While students often constructed simple subordinate and infinitive clauses accurately, there was again a widespread tendency to put the verb at the end after *und/oder/aber*; confident handling of a

variety of perfect tense forms proved difficult for some students as did the accurate use of the possessive pronouns *sein* and *ihr*. The most common weakness reported by examiners was the inability to achieve subject/verb agreement at a consistent level; errors like *ich schlafen, die Eltern kann, er wisse* were very frequent.

Gaps in their vocabulary prevented a few students from communicating effectively but most had a sufficient or good range of topic-specific and general vocabulary at their disposal. Students should however avoid the over-use of sophisticated but not always entirely appropriate idioms like *Was mich betrifft / Um ehrlich zu sein* etc. It was pleasing to witness that the confusion between *Gesundheit* and *gesund* was less prominent than in the past and the same applies to the inappropriate use of *Diät* for *Ernährung*; many students found it difficult to distinguish between *entspannend* and *(sich) entspannen*. Finally, examiners were again dismayed by the frequent use of *im Fern* for *im Fernsehen* and *auf dem Computer* while observing the increasing popularity of *pausen* for *anhalten* (*Man kann den Film pausen*).

Schools and colleges should take note that as from next year, cassette tapes for the recording of speaking tests will no longer be accepted.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion