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Examiners' Report June 2010

GCE German 6GN03

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Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response

Assessment Principles

This unit, unlike the legacy Unit 4/1, assesses understanding as well as communication and spoken language. It is marked out of 50, by Edexcel markers, although the examination itself may be conducted by a visiting examiner, or by a teacher examiner. This was the first session of the new specification, and the majority of teacher examiners had taken note of the new regulations, including the reduced time available for the total test. Centres should be aware that short tests are penalised, and that long tests are not listened to after 13 minutes.

Teachers would be well advised to study the new mark grid very carefully, as there is now a shift in emphasis from the previous A2 oral examination. This test assesses listening as well as speaking skills, which has certain implications for the way in which the test is conducted.

Candidates' Responses

The first part of the test is, as before, discussion of a controversial issue, which has been prepared in advance. Candidates have up to one minute to present their argument, outlining whether they are 'for' or 'against'. The examiner then takes the opposing view and a debate ensues. The total length for this part of the test is 5 minutes. Candidates should be aware that the topic chosen should be one for which there are two possible sides to the argument. The oral form which they have to submit clearly states this. Teachers should verify in advance that the topic is a suitable one, otherwise marks can be lost needlessly. It is hard to argue contrary to "ich bin gegen sehr dünne Models."

The most popular topics remain Abtreibung, Sterbehilfe, Atomkraft, but there were some more unusual ones such as Prostitution soll legalisiert werden, and das Kopftuchverbot.

Many candidates had undertaken in-depth research, preparing excellent arguments with relevant lexis. The rationale of this part of the test is that the candidates are on familiar ground, and this should give them confidence. Pre-learned, regurgitated material will, as always, be penalised. This is not in the spirit of an oral test, which should be a spontaneous discussion. There is a significant difference between well-prepared material and recited material, and markers are able to detect this, often from intonation.

The second part of the test covers at least two unpredictable areas. These are likely to be topics which have been discussed in the course of the GCE teaching, but the candidates must not know in advance what they are going to be. Teachers are advised to have at hand a wide selection of topics, so that each candidate has something different, as far as possible. If there are only about 3 topics, rotated amongst all the candidates, it looks as though these have been well prepared in advance and are not exactly 'unpredictable'. Centres are also advised not to use exclusively the General Topic Areas from Unit 1: again, this militates against the idea of spontaneity, and also does not reveal a wider range of lexis, or ideas.

Response

This area is marked out of 20, amounting to 40% of the total marks. It should be noted that this covers not only spontaneous discourse, but also range of lexis and structures, and the use of abstract language.

Many candidates were well prepared, and were able to respond promptly, spontaneously and lucidly. In particular they were likely to have relevant lexis for the prepared issue. Others had clearly made an effort to acquire the language of debate and discussion: *einerseits, andererseits, die Vor/Nachteile, meiner Meinung/Ansicht nach*. It was encouraging to note that some were willing and able to attempt more complex structures such as the passive and indirect speech.

Examiners should be aware that it is perfectly acceptable to interrupt candidates, and in fact they should expect this. The ability to react quickly to a shift in emphasis can be rewarded here. A natural, spontaneous conversation has small hesitations in order to reflect and then elaborate.

Abstract language was at times a more difficult area. It depended to a certain extent on what the topic was. Greater experience of this examination will probably show that it may be a good idea in the second section, to choose unpredictable areas which differ from one another in some way, to enable the candidate to develop a varying type of approach, and reveal a greater variety of language. So, for example, a topic such as *die Umwelt*, would enable the candidate to demonstrate factual knowledge, whereas *die Todesstrafe* may enable the candidate to give opinions. Many discussions were enlivened by the fact that the General Election took place during the examining period, and many of the students were able to vote for the first time. Some interesting dialogues ensued, revealing considerable depth of maturity and insight.

Quality of Language

This is marked out of 7, and assesses such grammatical issues as gender, case, singular/plural, past participles and word order. In addition, pronunciation and intonation, to a certain extent, are assessed. In many cases the influence of the first language is still very evident, with anglicisms creeping in. Some students appear to have been told, if in doubt, Germanicise the English word, which of course does work sometimes.

As many teachers and examiners have noted, certain areas which used to be assessed as quality of language, have now been subsumed into the response grid, so it would be incorrect to assume that quality of language plays an insignificant role.

Please note that it is not only native speakers who can attain full marks in this area. Candidates who have been well taught, probably visited a German-speaking country, had the opportunity to practise with a German assistant and have prepared well, are of course able to achieve 7/7 here.

Reading and research

7 marks are allocated for evidence of reading and research. This applies to both the chosen issue and to the unpredictable areas. Clearly candidates are more able to show their knowledge in the prepared part of the test, and indeed, many had done laudable amounts of research, providing statistics, examples, and references to newspaper articles and TV programmes. It is of course more difficult in the unpredictable areas, in that the candidate should not know what is going to be discussed. However, since many topics will have been included in the GCE curriculum, many candidates were still able to cite examples to illustrate a point which they wished to make: for example in a discussion about Sterbehilfe, many knew of the Daniel James case, and knew about the Dignitas Clinic. It is as much an ability to show an awareness of topics which are currently in the public eye, as the production of an enormous quantity of facts and figures.

Comprehension and development

This is a new area of assessment in this test, and is aimed at assessing understanding and the ability to deal with questioning. In order to respond, one has to have understood the question. This does have implications for the way in which questions are formulated and asked, in that there should be a wide variety in order to afford evidence of the candidate's ability. Many candidates were able to cope with every form of questioning, including in some cases analysing an imaginary scenario of "Was würden Sie in dem Fall tun, wenn Sie... gesehen/gemacht hätten?"

Development pre-supposes that the candidate has fully understood the question, and is then able to pick it up and run with it, giving not a one-sentence reply, but several sentences, developing a line of discussion en route. Many candidates had been advised to do this: however, repeating the question in a statement form is not really necessary, and can be a waste of time, especially now that the test is considerably shorter. For this reason too, I would suggest that it may be better to focus more closely on two unpredictable areas, rather than five or six in less detail. This enables the candidate to explore the subject in greater depth, showing ability to develop a line of thinking. A greater number of topics often creates greater superficiality. The reference in the mark grid to a wider variety of question forms means not only linguistically more complex, but also conceptually. This is the point where listening skills, the ability to analyse what has been heard, and to respond, are being tested.

Advice and Guidance

- **Issue:** candidates must choose a genuinely controversial issue, and argue consistently for or against it. The teacher examiner should propose the opposing view.
- **Timing:** the presentation may take the maximum time of one minute. Anything longer should be interrupted. Overall, the chosen issue should last 5 minutes. If it is longer, this erodes the time available for the unpredictable areas, now taking 6-8 minutes, for a total time of 11-13 minutes.
- **Conduct:** some teachers conducted the test as if it were identical to the legacy Unit 4/1. Please refer to the specification to check on how it is different. In particular, look closely at the mark grid to see what is being assessed, as this has implications for the conduct, not least on the style of questioning. This can no longer be minimal, otherwise there is no evidence of the candidate's comprehension abilities. Teachers may like to consider preparing a hierarchy of questions, ranging from the very simple, to the more challenging. A range is essential.
- **Oral chosen issue form:** this should be filled in correctly, in German, with the stance clearly stated. This is particularly important for candidates with a visiting examiner. These forms and the recordings are returned to centres. If there are any comments on the forms, centres should take note, as often this is the only feedback which the centre may receive.
- **Recording:** Good sound quality is essential. The microphone generally should be nearer to the candidate than the examiner. All mobile phones must be switched off (not just on silent, as there is otherwise electronic interference) and there should be no background noise or interruptions. AS and A2 oral tests must be recorded on separate cassettes. Please check that the tape is long enough: one candidate on each side of a C60, two on a C90. Please also check that every candidate has been recorded, that it is audible and at the correct speed. It is helpful to label the cassette as well as the box. Please ensure that every cassette is rewound to the beginning before posting them off. CD recordings are increasingly common: please ensure that they can be read on any machine and are not merely computer-compatible. With a large number of candidates, centres may find that a memory stick is the best option. This is returned to the centre in the same way that cassettes and CDs are returned.
- **Further information:** all information about the specification, mark schemes and training courses is available on the Edexcel website: www.edexcel.com. There is also the facility to contact any of the Principal Examiners through the Ask The Expert service. An online Oral Training Guide is also accessible.

Grade Boundaries

Raw Mark boundaries

Max Mark	A	B	C	D	E
50	43	38	33	28	23

Uniform Mark Scale boundaries

Max Mark	A	B	C	D	E
70	56	49	42	35	28

Please note that although the modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across MFL specifications are comparable at specification level.

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