

Report on the Units

June 2010

J731/R/10

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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.

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GCSE German J731

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Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first year of the new German GCSE specification and it ran alongside the legacy specification.

As expected, entries for this first year of the new examination were small, as Full Course accreditation of the new GCSE qualification is not scheduled until summer 2011. This means that it is difficult to make many useful generalisations about performance trends.

Not all the candidates were of Year 11 age, so they might not have completed a GCSE course in full, but this entry will have been a useful practice for them.

It would be useful for centres planning to enter for the examination next year to familiarise themselves with the characteristics of the new examination by studying this year's examination papers.

For further examples, it may also be useful to look at the cognate papers, A701/A703 French and A721/A723 Spanish, which also ran in 2010.

A711/01/02

General comments

Few candidates took papers at both Foundation and Higher tiers this year, so it is difficult to make many useful generalisations about performance trends.

Comparing performance on the papers with that on the legacy Listening papers this summer, marks were lower for these new papers. There could have been a variety of reasons for this. Candidates may still be adjusting to the different demands of the new style of paper or may have been entered before they were ready. Nonetheless, there were some high marks at both tiers.

One general and important point relates to the quality of candidates' handwriting. More than ever this year, examiners commented on how difficult it was to decipher some of the candidates' intended answers. This is especially an issue when an exercise requires candidates to write a letter in a box – it is often very difficult to work out what letter a candidate intended to write. Marks can be lost if answers are not legible.

Comments on individual questions

Foundation exercises

Exercise 1 was generally well done, though *Geschichte* (Q 2), *Klavier* (Q 6) and *Hallenbad* (Q 8) caused problems for some candidates.

Exercise 2 was generally well done.

In Q 11, some candidates thought that *klug* meant 'boring', while in Q 16 *Mannschaft* was interpreted as referring to her wanting to learn a language.

Q 13 also caused problems, as *hört mich zu* was not always understood.

Exercise 3 proved to be one to which candidates could relate well. However, the vocabulary in questions 19, 22 and 24 seemed to present some difficulties.

Foundation and Higher exercises

Exercise 4 (F) / 1 (H) was generally well answered.

In Q 3, errors involved giving the wrong age, or just a number.

In Q 4 *Karten* proved to be difficult.

In Q 7 some misunderstood *putzen* as 'paint' and *Fenster* as 'fence'.

There was some confusion between 15 and 50 in Q 8.

Exercise 5 (F) / 2 (H) was an effective discriminator and items of vocabulary that seemed to cause difficulty were: in Q10 *die beiden*, in Q11 *Himbeer*, in Q12 *Handschuhe* and in Q15 *Meinung*.

Higher exercises

Exercise 3 was on a topic expected to be familiar, but the vocabulary seemed to have caused problems for all but the highest-achieving candidates, especially: *das tägliche Leben* (Q 19) and *Flüsse* (Q 20) – perhaps the plural form caused some confusion, and *Luft* and *Müll* (Qs 21 and 22).

Exercise 4 was targeted at Grade A and candidates had to identify two pieces of information for each question.

Exercise 5 differentiated very well between candidates.

A712

General comments

The overall performance of the candidates for this first series of the new GCSE German specification was good. There was a variety of tasks submitted for moderation. All candidates carried out tasks on two different topics for two different purposes and submitted Speaking Notes Forms as required. These notes forms mostly adhered to the requirements of the specification in that candidates produced 5 bullet points with 8 words per bullet point. Appropriately completed Working Mark Sheets were also submitted.

Also required are the Centre Authentication Form (CCS160), the MS1s, the Working Mark Sheet and the Speaking Notes Forms of the candidates in the sample. It is important to check that the samples have recorded so that they can be moderated without difficulty.

Communication

Marks for communication were generally high; candidates produced enough language to address the task and the questions asked, including open-ended questions. Candidates who achieved high marks could express more than straightforward opinions, and justifications. Many gave extra information in response to the task, some were able to use relevant information to develop and justify their own ideas and points of view and they produced information spontaneously. It is often better to ask open-ended questions as these allow the candidate to respond more spontaneously.

Quality of Language

All candidates could use a range of straightforward structures and vocabulary, including different tenses. Responses ranged from sufficiently accurate to be comprehensible, to very fluent, coherent and consistent. Many candidates attempted to use a range of structures and vocabulary and some regularly used more complex language features like the conditional tense. There was not much use of a variety of subordinate clauses and this could be an area to focus on to improve performance.

Pronunciation and intonation

Generally, the pronunciation/intonation was accurate. There were some instances of first language interference. A common feature was the lack of umlauts. For example, *mochte* was often heard.

Application of assessment criteria

Generally, the application of the assessment criteria was consistent, although slightly generous at times for both the communication mark and the quality of language mark. To award marks in the top band for communication, candidates should respond fully to the task and to all the questions asked, including the unexpected ones. They should also develop and justify their own ideas. For the quality of language mark, the performance should be consistently fluent and coherent with confident and accurate use of a wide variety of clause types, vocabulary and structures, including verb structures and tenses.

A713/01/02

General comments

This component is worth 40% of the short course, or 20% of the full course option. This is in line with the national subject criteria for languages.

Each Tier has 40 questions, in 5 exercises of 8 marks each. Each Tier represents 5 grades (Foundation C, D, E, F, G, and Higher A*, A, B, C, D) and each of the exercises is targeted at a particular grade. The C and D grade exercises are identical, so Foundation Tier Exercises 4 and 5 are Higher Tier Exercises 1 and 2.

At Foundation Tier there are 8 questions requiring a response in English. At Higher Tier, there are 16 questions requiring answers in English, in the overlap exercise from Foundation Tier and Exercise 4. The exercise that is designed to be the most challenging is a multiple choice exercise in German (Exercise 5). Not all candidates are expected to find this easy.

Exercises are designed to cover vocabulary from several different subtopics of the specification, for example, in Exercise 1 in Foundation Tier the main context is 'School life in the UK and in the target language country or community' but question 1 refers to 'Food and drink as aspects of culture and health'.

Finally, candidates at all levels are expected to be able to separate vocabulary they know from vocabulary that they do not know. In practice this means that for Foundation Tier, the assessment tasks for Listening and Reading are based on material in the vocabulary list. The assessments contain some unfamiliar vocabulary but this will not be tested. For Higher Tier the assessment tasks for Listening and Reading are based on material in both the Foundation and Higher Tier lists. Assessments contain some unfamiliar vocabulary, and some of this will be tested, since the national subject criteria require candidates to use a range of techniques to deduce meaning.

Comments on individual questions

Foundation

The incline of difficulty seemed correct and some candidates had difficulty on Exercise 5, where they sometimes guessed answers. Candidates did not seem to be put off by words they did not recognise, such as *öde* in question 6.

Higher

The exercises discriminated fairly well, but surprisingly some candidates did better on Exercise 5 than 4. Many candidates did well on Exercise 1 but some candidates did not always find Exercise 2 easier than the non-verbal response in Exercise 3.

It would be beneficial to prepare candidates for the free English writing required by 16 out of 40 questions on the paper. There is no requirement for the English to be more than comprehensible, but it is important that candidates are precise.

It is also important for candidates to know that when they give more than one answer to a question requiring one mark, the first answer on the line is the one that is marked.

A714

General Comments & Principles

The majority of entrants this year appeared to be Year 10 candidates, whose teachers took the opportunity of trying out the new qualification, without undue risk to their final GCSE results.

The new Controlled Assessment procedure for Writing is intended to combine the advantages of the legacy Coursework option, such as teacher-guidance, centre/department scheduling-to-suit and candidate freedom with the rigour of external assessment as in the legacy Examination unit. Candidates are required to submit 2 items of work on different topics, each with a different purpose or focus. The notion of 'different purpose' should not be a hindrance either to candidates or to teachers, since the content of a 'report' or 'article' will not necessarily be substantially different from the content of a 'letter' or a 'blog' or an extended 'email'. Nevertheless, it is essential that candidates keep this given 'purpose' very much to the forefront of their thinking, and that they style their writing to this end. A letter of any sort, for example, which shows no reference to or awareness of its notional recipient's response is not a realistic or effective letter. This point should be reinforced to candidates in the course of normal teaching.

Task-based Controlled Assessment in Writing is very much intended to provide for candidate individuality, so that each candidate may write for him/herself and demonstrate the extent of his/her capabilities. Hence the great importance of task differentiation according to the candidate potential perceived. It should be noted that the Teacher Information Form indicating the task, is only intended to offer bullet point suggestions in English as to how the candidates might construct a response. These are neither prescriptive, nor should they contain extended detail. The ideas and the development should be the candidate's own, and higher-achieving candidates – as was seen with the legacy Coursework option – are best served with minimal prompts, in some cases a title by itself was sufficient. However, lower-achieving candidates benefit from greater direction and ideas, but still the processing and development should be their own. There is no longer any penalty for 'omitting' any task suggestion, as overall coherence, appropriateness, relevance, clarity and effectiveness in terms of title and purpose are considered more meaningful, and ultimately fairer, means of evaluation.

The suggested lengths of "up to 600 words across the two tasks" for candidates aiming at grades C-A* and "up to 350 words across the two tasks" for candidates aiming at grades G-D (*Specification p. 14 and p. 23*) should be taken as important recommendations. The required time to write each task response is between 45 and 60 minutes, and this should be sufficient for candidates to show what they can do, without writing excessively and possibly risking undermining the coherence of their response. Success will be achieved by overall completeness and not by writing as much as possible, either to fill time or in the hope of improving a grade.

Experience with the legacy Coursework option has shown that candidates aiming for grades G-D write more clearly and more effectively when they do not try to write too much.

Approach to Tasks

Given the small entry this first year the range of tasks produced was limited and tended to be *Schule, Familienleben, Stadt/Umgebung, Urlaub* or *Freizeit*. The restriction of the content to one Topic area is no longer a requirement of this new Specification, and the sample Controlled Assessment Writing tasks on the OCR website for teacher use, adaptation or reference, demonstrate this clearly, offering plenty of ideas. The above task topics offered this year have always tended to be popular and well practised, but several candidates were nonetheless able to

bring an original and individual approach that was both refreshing and convincing, demonstrating very clearly an ability to think for themselves.

It was also pleasing to see within a centre a variety of different task topics and also different task purposes, which suggested that candidates had indeed been encouraged to write for themselves on what they wanted to write. It is recognized that some teachers may not initially feel too comfortable with giving greater freedom to their pupils in this way, but it is in the spirit of best practice, should be more motivating, and the absence of specifically required content means, of course, that these do not have to be checked.

Even though teachers submit candidates' work for external assessment, it is advisable to be familiar with the assessment criteria so that alternative practice tasks set throughout the course can be assessed and decisions made on which are a candidate's two best pieces for submission. Ideally, more than two will be completed so that candidates have the opportunity to improve over time and to write on a range of topics. It is recommended that teachers give guidance early in the course on how to make useful notes for the Writing Notes Form (Candidates). The notes must be of 40 words maximum over 5 bullet points (usually 8 words per bullet point). Candidates can make best use of this form to remind themselves of a language structure considered difficult to remember or vocabulary items difficult to spell, or perhaps a word order sequence considered important. This can save time on the day of the final task taking. The form is intended to assist candidates but it also has to be submitted and it is considered by the examiner. This year some forms were left blank, or contained very little, sometimes even English words, and as a result they would not have been of great help to the candidates concerned.

An important feature of this new specification is that evidence of three tenses or time-frames is no longer a requirement for the C grade— see *Grade Descriptions*, p.42. Tense variation and range come under the heading of 'structure' and so are relevant to the overall Quality of the language produced, but a paragraph specifically to demonstrate past tense competence, then one on the future and one in the conditional tense tend not to enhance the overall Communication of the piece of writing. Tense variation is important, but, much as all elements of content, needs to be given a clear point. This year there was some over-preparation in the sense of over-insurance in this regard. In practising for writing candidates would benefit from exploring the effective use of different tenses more naturally, perhaps through relevant contrasts. It was also clear this year that candidates were unfortunately not always in control of some basic present tenses, and this tended to mar several opening paragraphs and their initial impression.

Tenses are only one of a great many structural features by which candidates can convey their thoughts and ideas. A number of candidates were able to demonstrate quite wide clause competence, well beyond the simple use of *weil* + adjective + *ist* / *war*, which virtually all candidates can use easily to offer interesting vocabulary and effective idiom. Sometimes an awareness of the inversion rule in German was missing, and because it is a basic structural feature - itself amounting to idiomatic usage - it deserves plenty of practice.

Most candidates wrote neatly, with comparatively little crossing-out, and all teachers will want to point out to their candidates the importance of legibility. There were very few word-processed items. If candidates choose to word-process their work, it is important to impress upon them that this option does demand good word-processing skills, as typing errors, poor punctuation and word omissions spoil the coherence and effectiveness of the message. Punctuation that shows that the candidate understands what s/he is writing is equally important in hand-written items, and candidates always benefit from taking time to read through and check the sense of what they have written.

Finally, it must be said that for those candidates entered this year, the exercise seems to have been very worthwhile and they have every reason to be satisfied with the outcome. Any latent fears about writing longer pieces to time seem to be unfounded. Inevitably there were occasional

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administrative omissions with the new paperwork, but these were easily rectified. Over-preparation of task content to bullet points was at times detectable, but this will be highlighted where appropriate. Next year's full cohort entry will in the main have had the benefit of two full years' teaching preparation to produce an anticipated much wider range of Controlled Assessment material for comment.

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