



GCSE

Persian

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J735**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course) **J035**
J135

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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This mark scheme is published as an aid to teachers and students, to indicate the requirements of the examination. It shows the basis on which marks were awarded by examiners. It does not indicate the details of the discussions which took place at an examiners' meeting before marking commenced.

All examiners are instructed that alternative correct answers and unexpected approaches in candidates' scripts must be given marks that fairly reflect the relevant knowledge and skills demonstrated.

Mark schemes should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and the report on the examination.

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A821 Listening

General Comments:

There was no problem; most questions were clear with some level of challenge. However, a more challenging set of questions addressing more modern topics may be considered more appropriate for the future.

Teachers should encourage students to practise past papers to develop their ability in answering certain types of questions.

Students should understand the purpose of different types of question prior to the examination.

It is recommended that the accurate transfer of the meaning of key words should be practised with students.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Questions 1 to 12:

- A straightforward exercise
- A high percentage answered correctly.

Questions 13 to 18:

- Clear questions
- Correct answers to most were given by a large number of students.
- Q17 differentiated at the higher level.

Questions 19 to 24:

- 19 and 21 caused some difficulties.
 - Q19: The key word is “healthy”.
 - Q21 led to some translation-related ambiguity.

The rest of the questions:

- All were clear, with certain key words that challenged students and differentiated their levels.

A822 Speaking

General Comments:

The overall quality of the candidates this year for the oral examination was markedly better than in previous years. Students appeared to be more fluent and performed better under examination conditions. This was reflected in the marking - which yielded better marks than in previous years.

This improvement in performance may be attributed, among other factors, to the growth of supplementary schools, which give the candidates a chance to study the subject to a higher standard.

The tests consist of two parts:

- Part 1 comprises a one-minute presentation based on a topic chosen by the candidate and a follow-up conversation for about four minutes, on the same topic between the candidate and examiner.
- Part 2 is a five-minute general conversation between the candidate and the examiner on selected topics.

In general the tests were conducted fairly satisfactorily and there were not any major issues. This document highlights some of the key observations as reported by the principal and assistant examiners who assessed and marked the recorded tests. It is hoped that these observations and the subsequent recommendations made by the principal examiner, will help to improve the future conduct of these tests.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Part 1

Presentation

The candidates talked about a topic of their choice for about one minute and this formed the basis of a follow-up conversation between candidates and examiner. The presentations were mostly prepared during the preparation period and were delivered with timely accuracy and often in a formal and non-colloquial style.

With the World Cup looming next year, football continued to be a favourite topic of discussion as well as other sporting activities. Among other popular topics of presentations were *Nourooz*, holiday travels abroad, martial arts, 'school and friends', 'home and family', and food.

Some presentations were short and performed briskly. Candidates need to be briefed in detail before the test on the length of time they need to take to present their talk and also on the speed of delivering the talk.

A number of presentations were clearly memorised ahead of the test. Here, the emphasis is not on the ability of the candidates to memorise a text accurately and redeliver it in the form of a speech but on their skills in speaking freely. While candidates are expected to have prepared and committed to memory the general structure of the presentation, they are not expected to replay a word by word copy of a certain text as their presentation.

There were a few examples of presentations in which the candidate was reading from a prepared text. This is not an acceptable practice and the centres were appropriately warned.

Follow-up conversation

As before, candidates were largely comfortable talking about the topic that they had already presented. Often they took the lead and spoke almost without encouragement from the examiner.

There were, however, many instances when the candidate had not much more to deliver than the key points already covered in the talk. The teacher/examiner needs to notify the candidates of the need to expand on the issues they may have covered in their presentation and help them by asking the sort of open-ended questions which would encourage the candidates to speak.

The point of great importance, both in this part as well as in part two, is for the teachers/examiners to avoid conducting the questioning in the style of an interview, particularly when the questions asked require brief answers with no opportunity for the candidate to build a sentence around them. This pattern appears to be popular among the less experienced examiners, who are inquisitive about some of the more specific features of a candidate's topic rather than asking general questions that allow the candidate to focus on a personal response to specific issues.

Candidates this year were using more complex verbs and more verbs in the past perfect tense than before.

Part 2

General conversation

In this part the candidates' speaking skills are tested with more freedom to choose a topic of their own interest. This is the part where differentiation takes place between the more competent and fluent candidates and those who have lesser command of the language.

This part of the speaking test requires the candidate to select a topic out of three suggestions and respond to questions, expand on the topic and speak freely on the issues related to the topic.

Teachers and examiners often used the suggested list of questions at the end of the teacher's pack as a means of encouraging the candidate to speak. It must be remembered that this list consists of suggested questions and is best used as a guide for the conducting teacher. The aim of the examiner must be to provide the candidate with ample opportunities to speak as freely and as expansively as possible. An interview and a question and answer style of conversation should be avoided.

Candidates were sometimes doubtful about how far they should continue with the answer and, although they were confident of their speaking abilities and performed this part with relative ease, there were some instances of undue silence that need the teacher's interjection to save the conversation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the quality of the candidates in speaking tests keeps rising. But still many centres do not carry out standard preparation for such an examination. For example, it is reasonable to expect that they would allow the person conducting the examination time to familiarise themselves with the paper, prior to beginning the examination. For candidates who are not already familiar with the paper this has a noticeable effect on their delivery during the test. With a person coming in specially to conduct this test, centres must first go over with them the paper

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or standard procedures for such a test. This will undoubtedly be to the advantage of the candidates.

The other factor that works to the detriment of the student is that fact that some people conducting the test are not native or fluent speakers of Persian (Farsi), the language of the test. Their delivery is sometimes markedly stilted and can be confusing and discouraging for the students — who are easily influenced in their responses by the way a question is put to them.

Similarly, these same examiners at times would not allow enough time for the students to respond fully to the questions, depriving the candidates of marks.

Equally important is the style and accuracy of conducting the test by the examiner. Asking personal and irrelevant questions should be avoided. Examiners must remember this is not an interview but a speaking test. The candidate, and not the examiner, is supposed to be the main speaker.

A final point that should be stressed is that centres must standardise the format in which recordings are sent. Examinations were received in various forms, including USB sticks and even tapes. The problem is that with this there is a great space for human error and the likelihood that some material will not play or will be corrupted by the time it arrives. This makes the process of getting marks down extremely long and tedious. It also means that many students are vulnerable to their examination recording being damaged and therefore they may not get the grade they deserve. USB sticks carry the risk of having a virus, not to mention the fact that examiners are advised not to mark them. Tapes are almost non-existent these days, which means many assessors probably do not have access to tape players. CDs which are not formatted properly can take several attempts before they play in one form of media player or another.

Centres are asked to follow the instructions as detailed in the OCR document sent to each centre.

A823 Reading

General Comments:

The examination results this year show that the candidates seemed to find the paper accessible and no major problem has been identified in their dealing with the different sections of it. The overwhelming majority of the candidates seemed to have sufficient knowledge of Persian and adequate familiarity with the examination format.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Exercise 1: Qs 1-5

A straightforward set of questions which were very well answered.

Exercise 2: Qs 6-12

Questions and rubrics were well understood and the questions well answered.

Exercise 3: Qs 13-18

Questions and rubrics were well understood. However, it is worth reminding candidates that they are expected to choose the answers from the list/bank of words provided in the box. Similar words or phrases reflecting the same meaning are not accepted as correct answers and will result in their losing a mark.

Exercise 4: Qs 19-24

Rubrics were well understood. No problem was identified in the accessibility of this exercise.

Exercise 5: Qs 25-30

Candidates generally understood this exercise and answered the questions well. However, to score a mark they needed to give **precise** answers to questions 26, 27a and 27b. The acceptable answer to Q26: 'What has Shadi's mum asked Roxanna to do?' is: 'To take /bring **Claire** with her to Iran.' The answer 'to bring her' (without mentioning Claire) was not acceptable.

Similarly Q 27a & 27b:

'How will Roxanna help Claire on the day of the flight? Give 2 details.' This question requires precise answers:

27a- to meet her **at the airport (Heathrow)**

27b- sit next to her **on the plane**

Without mentioning where Roxanna was to meet Claire or that she was to sit next to her the answer was considered incomplete and therefore was awarded no mark.

The same rule applied to Q.29a and Q.29 b: '**Who** has Shadi's mum contacted and **what** has she asked her to do?' The acceptable answer had to have **Claire's** name mentioned: 'To give Claire **Persian /Farsi** lessons or to prepare Claire for her examination'. It is worth highlighting the fact the name of the language of Iran is: **Persian** or **Farsi** and **NOT** Iranian. Candidates sitting this paper are expected of to know the correct name of the language being examined.

Exercise 6: Qs 31-36

Again in the case of this exercise, the comments provided for Exercise 3 apply. Once again the attention of the candidate needs to be drawn to the fact that, as indicated in the rubrics, **all answers can be found among the words listed for them in the box**. Answers not included in the list are not accepted.

Exercise 7: Qs 37-42

Candidates need to be advised to read the text carefully before attempting to answer these questions. Answers based on the candidates' general knowledge or common sense are not given marks. All questions are based on specific points in the text.

Candidates can achieve marks only if they answer the questions fully. For example:

Q. 37 'In what way is Javad's school team special?' The acceptable answer must contain '...best / winning **school team in England**'.

Q. 41 'How do we know life at the camp was hard?' The answer: '**7-8 hours training**' would not be complete without mentioning '**per day**'.

Exercise 8: Qs 43-48

Candidates also need to be reminded that at this stage in the paper, the answers need to be **precise**. Those who copied out sentences from the text did not gain marks.

A824 Writing

General Comments:

Candidates overall used their knowledge of the Persian language appropriately to respond to their selected two questions out of five options.

Many excellent answers gave detailed accounts on the chosen subject, using a variety of vocabulary and a range of tenses. Exceptional answers not only followed the guide but also added further illustrative detail to their description.

Excellent answers gave a variety of justifications for points made and attempted to do that in different tenses.

Others needed to develop their style of writing to vary from just the present tense and avoid writing a response that read like bullet points.

A few candidates appeared to misunderstand the requirement of their chosen question and at times the paper itself. This led to long responses on a topic that did not feature in the actual questions.

There were also examples of candidates responding to the Persian Writing paper question with English text or the submission of a blank examination paper. This is a reoccurrence – there were similar instances last year.

There was also a student who appeared to have a strong understanding of Persian, but failed to do well because of failing to understand the question in English.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

This was a widely answered question. There were responses that showed a clear and sometimes sophisticated style and an ability to provide strong explanations and justifications.

It was pleasing to see candidates use varied tenses in their response to their subject matter.

When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually as a result of incorrect grammar use or failing to write full sentences.

Question No. 2

This was a well answered question. Candidates achieved higher marks when they engaged with the topic and gave exact examples of experiences.

Candidates generally did well with meeting the criteria of the question and their writing supported their chosen topic.

Most responses provided a good variety of tenses, vocabulary and examples to create the type of narrative the question required.

When candidates did not achieve higher marks it was usually because of insufficient vocabulary to express what they wished to convey.

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Question No. 3

This question was not widely answered - but those candidates that attempted it generally gave strong answers that engaged with the topic and showed clear understanding.

Most responses provided a good variety of tenses, vocabulary and examples to create the type of narrative the question required.

There was an improvement compared with last year in responses to this type of subject.

Question No. 4

This question was answered well by candidates. The best answers delved into details of a trip, with correct context of the experience.

Question No. 5

This question was answered well by candidates. Those that attempted it generally showed strong understanding of what the question required and were able to secure good marks. Strong candidates gave detailed responses with good vocabulary, tenses and justifications.

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