

OCR STANDING JOINT COMMITTEE

**REPORT OF THE TEACHERS' COMMENTS
ON THE OCR GCSE EXAMINATIONS 2011**

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The OCR SJC exists to scrutinise and put forward to OCR GCSE examiners and officials, where appropriate, teachers' comments – both critical and laudatory – on all aspects of OCR GCSE examinations. The SJC system was established by teachers' professional associations: the OCR SJC, in common with others, is made up of practising, specialist teachers who, between them, cover the complete range of subject expertise. The appropriate subject specialist examines all submissions from teachers and the report which is generated as a result is discussed by the SJC. All subjects reported upon are examined in detail. The names of individual teachers and schools are not published.

OCR Responses

OCR would like to thank the SJC and those teachers who made detailed comments on the GCSE examinations: we value such feedback and use it to inform the next round of question paper setting and as a prompt to refine the supporting administrative processes.

We have answered each comment in this report to the best of our ability but recognise that in some cases we may need to address further questions or requests for information.

We encourage any further feedback to be directed through the SJC to their established contacts within OCR. However, individual enquiries can always be made through the OCR Customer Contact Centre, the contact details for which can be found on the OCR website at <http://www.ocr.org.uk/index.html>

GCSE ADMINISTRATION REPORT: GENERAL COMMENT and

OCR RESPONSES

The Standing Joint Committee expressed their concern regarding the preparation of papers.

The following questions were raised:

How are QPEC members selected?

How are Revisers and Scrutineers appointed?

Assessors attending QPEC meetings are selected in line with the rules of the Ofqual Code of Practice.

Where a new Setter/Reviser/Scrutineer is required, Assessor Management place an advert in the appropriate medium where the advertisement will guide the potential applicant to the Assessor page on the OCR website. The potential applicant will view the task descriptor, further information on the task, the assessment opportunities application form and download the assessment exercise required to be completed and submitted. If they are interested in applying the applicant completes the application form and the assessment exercise and submits to OCR electronically.

Assessor Management log the applications and forward to the relevant Chair of Examiners and Qualifications Manager for selection. Applicants are selected against the task descriptor and criteria as outlined in the briefing and selection pack. In addition Setters are interviewed. The successful applicant will be informed by email. Once we have received the acceptance from the successful applicant, the unsuccessful applicants are informed by email.

How long is the Term of Office of QPEC members, Revisers and Scrutineers?

Setters, Revisers and Scrutineers are sent invitation documentation electronically. This contains a cover email, the OCR Assessor Terms and Conditions, the Task Descriptor, a schedule, handbook, and acceptance of assessment task form. If the assessor reads, agrees and accepts the Terms and Conditions for assessment tasks, the agreement terminates automatically and without notice when the assessor has completed the assessment task.

A Setter, Reviser or Scrutineer will normally be invited to undertake the task again unless there are concerns with the quality of the task produced/undertaken, or other professional issues.

What checking procedures are in place to ensure that amendments have been implemented and that revising has taken place?

Once the setter has produced a first draft of the assessment material OCR Question Paper Management (QPM) send this to the reviser(s). The reviser completes their task and fills in a detailed checklist and returns the material to QPM who log the material and send the revisers comments to the setter who will decide on what amendments to make. Once completed the assessment material is returned to and logged with QPM.

SUBJECT ADMINISTRATION COMMENTS and OCR RESPONSES

GCSE CLASSICAL SUBJECTS

Timetable Clash - Latin and Classical Greek

It was felt unhelpful to candidates to have papers both these subjects scheduled for the same day (June 16th). Many taking Classical Greek are likely to be taking Latin as well. Teachers wondered whether two modern foreign language units would be timetabled together in this way.

Several centres commented on this combination, and so we will request for these to be separated in the next series of timetables. In response to the query about the timetable of modern foreign languages, French, German and Spanish are not timetabled together, however Dutch, Gujarati, Persian, Portuguese and Turkish are timetabled together.

Prose Literature A403/02 and Verse Literature A404/02:

The opinion was expressed that eight and ten mark questions were too intensive for this level and that it would be fairer to offer a shorter passage for comment and ask for a specific number of points to be made. It was suggested that the bullet points could be reduced to one or two. The prose texts this year (particularly Tacitus in the OCR anthology selection) were regarded as very challenging in themselves, so that just translating and understanding proved difficult, even without the considerable burden of lengthy stylistic analysis. It was reported that the AS level approach to style questions is actually easier than GCSE at the moment.

Candidates were felt to be required to have a far too sophisticated stylistic understanding of the prescribed material. One hour for each set text paper was described as 'clearly insufficient time'. When one takes into account the timetable pressures in providing for Classical subjects, it was once more felt that OCR should consider its position and set GCSE Latin papers of an appropriate standard. It seemed to respondents that the standard of OCR GCSE Latin is unrelated to that of OCR's other GCSE subjects and that too much is being demanded by the specification.

In response to centre feedback over the first two years of the new specification, OCR has made some changes to the format of some of the questions in the literature units. These changes include replacing one of the two ten-mark questions in the literature papers with several shorter-answer questions. The number of bullet points in the remaining ten-mark question

has been reduced from three to two. The updated specimen assessment materials can be downloaded from the OCR website.

In respect of concerns about the level of demand of the assessments, candidates coped well with the 2011 papers and, in general, time did not seem to be an issue, with many candidates writing at considerably greater length than was required. Many candidates produced excellent answers to the extended writing questions in both papers. OCR considers the demand of GCSE Latin papers to be in line with that of other Classics subjects at GCSE.

SUBJECT SPECIFIC COMMENTS and
OCR RESPONSES

GCSE GEOGRAPHY B

Specification/code number/alt: J385
Paper/code number: B563/02

The examination paper did not give candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their balanced knowledge since both case studies in Section C Natural Studies required an LEDC (Less Economically Developed Country) slant. MEDC (More Economically Developed Country) hazards were not offered in the more substantial final parts of each question.

We would agree that the paper did not expect candidates to demonstrate their balanced knowledge in Theme 3 (which is entitled Natural Hazards, in fact, and not Natural Studies). There were, on this occasion, more marks for questions relating to LEDCs. That said, Q5 (Drought) had 4 marks on drought impacts in MEDCs & 4 marks comparing the impact in MEDCs & LEDCs. Q6 (Tectonics) had 4 marks on observation centres which apply to MEDCs and 2 marks on protection in Japan

Balanced knowledge is something that we expect candidates to acquire during their GCSE course. However, in assessing at this level we do not undertake to set what might be considered a balanced selection of questions. In devising appropriate optional questions, of comparable demand, and in varying what we test from year to year, we do set out to cover the entire specification over a small number of years, but not necessarily in a predictable manner.

It might also be pointed out that since a candidate would only have answered one of the two questions, it would not have assisted their demonstration of balanced knowledge even if we had set one case study question on MEDCs and the other on LEDCs.

LATIN: J281

Latin Language 1 A401 and Latin Language 2 A402

There is some feeling that OCR should reconsider the current method of marking translations. The present method was described as 'a blunt instrument in that a candidate can suddenly lose 20% or 40% of the available mark because of errors without getting credit for what is correct.' The SJC understands the importance of accuracy but would prefer a more positive approach to marking. It is well known that some past OCR marking has awarded on this positive basis and that other examinations, including some at University, award in this way

OCR thanks the SJC for this measured comment. We are always striving to improve and in fact have recently completed some light revision of Latin GCSE mark schemes. We would certainly confirm that to reward positively is absolutely our aim.

An earlier method of marking translations involved dealing with a very large number of marks and then dividing the total by four to arrive at the candidate's mark. While this may in some senses have been more positive in approach, there were other issues with this method. It was prone to arithmetic error. Also, we are now not permitted to award *half* marks for answers; awarding what amounted to *quarter* marks would be difficult to justify, against this backdrop.

Our present translation mark scheme on the language papers is a 'proportion of sense' mark scheme and it does indeed set out to help markers reward on the basis of how much of the sense is clear. In this respect the approach is positive. Errors are mentioned in the descriptors, to aid decision-making, but in the sense of what errors will be *allowed* still to be on a particular mark.

Current translation mark descriptors

[4] Correct translation, with one minor error allowed

[3] Overall sense clear, with one serious or two minor errors allowed

[2] Part correct; overall sense lacking/unclear

[1] Not coherent; isolated knowledge of vocabulary only

[0] Totally incorrect or omitted.

Marks for each section should be awarded as follows. N.B. Consequential errors should not be penalised.

It is important to point out that there are four marks available *for each section* in a translation. Since these move in 25% jumps from one mark to another it will sound harsher than may be the reality for a particular candidate across the whole translation. On A401/02 there are *five* sections each worth four marks. On A402/02 there are *ten* sections each worth four marks. In fact, across the piece most candidates seem to be able to pick up good marks, even if here and there they do not hit the maximum.

GCSE MATHEMATICS

Specification/code number/alt: Mathematics C J517

Paper/code number: B281

This was felt to be an appropriate length of paper and level of difficulty for a terminal paper. The wording of the questions was felt to be appropriate with good specification coverage between papers A and B.

[We welcome that feedback.](#)

Specification/code number/alt: Mathematics C J517

Paper/code number: B277/B278

These modular papers were felt to be of appropriate length and level of difficulty. The wording of questions was also felt to be appropriate with good specification coverage between papers A and B.

[We welcome that feedback.](#)

Specification/code number/alt: Mathematics A

Paper/code number: A502/01

This was felt to be an appropriate length of paper and level of difficulty. The wording of the questions was also felt to be appropriate.

However, reservations were expressed about the overall coverage of the specification, in particular the lack of any questions relating to FB 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 or FB 7, algebraic graphs and inequalities. The only algebraic content related to coordinate work (question 3) and the algebraic perimeter of a square (question 5). Question 5 depended on an understanding of perimeter which does not appear in the specification for unit B but in unit C, section FC 9.

There was some reservation expressed relating to the testing of algebra, which was disappointing. The paper did not test at all the important topics of algebraic graphs and inequalities i.e. FB 6.1, 6.2, 6.3 and FB 7. Instead the only algebraic content tested was FB 5.1 and 5.3, questions 5 and 3 respectively, both of which could also be tested in unit A (FA 6.1 and 6.3). Furthermore question 5 (worth 5 out of the papers 60 marks) depended heavily on the concept of perimeter that does not appear in Unit B but instead in Unit C (FC 9).

[The assessment will seek to cover all learning outcomes over time and each individual assessment will address some but not all of the topics within the unit. Whilst the word *perimeter* is not specifically mentioned until unit C the knowledge to answer question 5 is covered both under the specification reference FB5.1 and also at KS3.](#)

GCSE RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Specification/code number/alt : J621

Paper/code number : B602

Questions a) and d) were on the Messiah. This meant that seven marks were awarded for a topic that is not named in the Specification. (It is not included in the main text of Mayled's book, the recommended textbook, although it is covered in the definitions at the back. It is also not mentioned in the revision book.) Whilst centres covered revelation about God through the person of Jesus the Messiah is an entirely different concept. Centres have always understood that the detail of the question has to be in the Specification. Teachers delivering the Specification need to know if this is not the case. This is yet another case of a Reviser not doing his/her job properly and a QPEC failing to do theirs.

There was no significant evidence to indicate that candidates were unable to provide an appropriate response and so earn the 1 mark allocated to the part a) question. The Levels of Response mark scheme applied to the part d) question, worth 6 marks, allowed for a wide range of candidate responses such that no candidate would be penalised for taking a wider interpretation of the question. Centres are reminded that it is the Assessment Objectives in the specification which are being tested and not the content of text books - endorsed or otherwise. The Report to Centres provides more detail on the performance of candidates attempting these questions.