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Oral training guide

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Part 1 General guidelines

Introduction

This guide is for teachers who are preparing candidates for, and conducting, the Edexcel GCE Italian oral examinations. This guide relates to the requirements of the Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary GCE and Advanced GCE in Italian specification (for teaching from September 2008).

The Advanced Subsidiary GCE (AS level) oral examination will be assessed for the first time in June 2009 and the Advanced GCE (A2 level) oral examination in June 2010. All the tests will be externally assessed by Edexcel.

The AS level oral examination is *Unit 1: Spoken Expression and Response in Italian*.

The unit code is:

6IN01 Italian

The A2 level oral examination is *Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Italian*.

The unit code is:

6IN03 Italian

Essential preparation

Teachers should familiarise themselves with the details of the AS oral examination (Unit 1) in the Edexcel GCE Italian specification (page 4), the assessment requirements (page 9), the unit description (pages 19-23) and the assessment criteria (pages 24-25). The details of the A2 oral examination (Unit 3) can be found on page 6, the assessment requirements on page 11, the unit description on pages 33-35 and the assessment criteria on pages 36-37 of the Edexcel GCE Italian specification.

Related documents can be downloaded from the Edexcel website at www.edexcel.com. The assessment criteria for Units 1 and 3 can also be found on page 9 of this guide.

It is essential that teachers are aware of the requirements of each unit, as incorrectly conducted tests can adversely affect candidates' marks.

AS Unit 1: Spoken Expression and Response in Italian

Students will be rewarded for their ability to demonstrate understanding of a short Italian-language text (linked to one of the general topic areas of the AS specification) and to engage in general discussion on the same general topic area. Understanding of the text will be tested by questions posed by the teacher/examiner, who will then develop the conversation into a more general discussion of the topic area.

Before the test, students will choose one of the four following general topic areas:

Youth culture and concerns

Lifestyle: health and fitness

The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world

Education and employment.

A definitive list of the subtopics linked to each of these general topic areas is provided below:

- Youth culture and concerns
 - Music and fashion
 - Technology (eg MP3/blogs/mobile phones/internet/games)
 - Relationships (family/friendships and peer pressure)
 - Drink, drugs, sex
- Lifestyle: health and fitness
 - Sport and exercise
 - Food and diet
 - Health issues (eg smoking, skin cancer, health services)
- The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world
 - Tourist information, travel and transport
 - Weather (eg natural disasters, climate change)
 - Pollution and recycling
- Education and employment
 - Education (schooling and higher education)
 - Education policy and student issues
 - The world of work (eg the changing work scene, job opportunities and unemployment).

Students are free to choose any of the four general topic areas, depending on their preference and interests. Students should be advised to choose a topic area with which they are familiar and which they are prepared to discuss in detail.

Unit 1 tests will be set on each of the four topic areas. The tests will be in the form of a short stimulus text in the target language. 15 minutes before the test, students will be given, at random, one of the stimuli for the topic area they have chosen. Examples of these stimuli can be found in the specimen assessment material published by Edexcel and can be downloaded from the Edexcel website at www.edexcel.com.

Each stimulus must be exploited in accordance with the sequence stipulated by Edexcel for each examination session.

This sequence must be applied to all candidates except where a particular instruction might cause distress (for example reference to relative who is ill or similar situation); in this case the next suitable stimulus must be used. The sequence must be continued after breaks in examining in any one day, for example after lunch.

Students will have 15 minutes preparation time to study the stimulus allocated to them. During this time, they should study the text with a view to answering questions about it, and to discussing the subject of the text in more detail.

Students should be encouraged to use this time effectively. Further guidance on preparing students for the test can be found later in this handbook.

It is important that students know that, in the first part of the test (Section A), they will be asked to offer opinions about the subject of the text and the related subtopic, and to discuss it in some detail, in addition to demonstrating comprehension of the text. In the second part of the test (Section B) students will need to talk about other aspects of the general topic area they have chosen.

Students may not use a dictionary or any other resources during the preparation time. They may make notes (up to one side of A4 paper if they wish) but must not write on the stimulus provided.

Students must take both the stimulus and any notes into the examination and may refer to both at any point during the test. Both the stimulus and the notes must be handed to the teacher/examiner at the end of the test, and must be retained by the centre until 20th September in the year of the test.

The Unit 1 test comprises two sections.

Section A

The teacher/examiner will begin the test by asking the four questions set by Edexcel and printed in the teacher/examiner's material. These questions do not appear on the test card given to the students.

The first two of these four questions ask students to demonstrate factual understanding of the stimulus text. The second two ask students to express their opinions about, or give their reactions to, the subject matter of the stimulus text.

In the interests of comparability and for the purposes of fair assessment across all centres, **the teacher/examiner must not rephrase or expand on these questions.** It is very important that teacher/examiners do not rephrase or expand on these questions, as to do so will adversely affect the students' marks for *Response* and *Understanding (Stimulus specific)*.

As teacher/examiners may not rephrase or expand the four questions set by Edexcel, during preparation for this part of the test students should be coached to give full and/or extended answers to the set questions.

If a student provides a particularly full answer to the third question that pre-empts the fourth question, the teacher/examiner should still ask the fourth question. This is done to ensure that all candidates have the same assessment experience, but students need to be advised that this could occur.

Section B

In this section, the teacher/examiner must initiate a discussion about the general topic area chosen by each student. The specific topic of the stimulus may be used as a starting point for this discussion, but the teacher/examiner must move away from this topic to more general discussion of the topic area and its linked subtopics. Failure to move away to different subtopics could have an adverse impact on final marks.

A list of questions that relate to each of the subtopics identified for all of the general topic areas can be found on page 19 of this guide. The questions are not in sequence, nor are they mandatory. They may be rephrased or substituted by others related to the same subtopic. Teachers should also devise additional questions of their own related to each of the subtopics.

There is no requirement in the AS Unit 1 oral test for students to demonstrate knowledge of countries and contexts in which Italian is spoken¹, though of course they are free to do so.

Although this unit relates to a chosen general topic area, it is essentially designed to assess manipulation and understanding of the Italian spoken language. The general topic areas should be considered as different contexts in which students can develop, use and understand spoken Italian language. *Detailed, specialist* Italian vocabulary or *detailed and specialist* knowledge of the chosen general topic area are not required.

Timing of the AS Unit 1 test

The AS Unit 1 test should last between eight and 10 minutes.

The test time should be divided equally between Sections A and B. However, if students complete the answers to the questions in Section A in less than four minutes, the teacher/examiner should ensure that the discussion in Section B is extended, in order that the **total test time is at least eight minutes**. Excess candidate material will not be assessed.

Choice of AS Unit 1 general topic area

Students must consider their free choice of general topic area for the AS level Unit 1 test very carefully. They should be advised to choose a general topic area which they have prepared and which they are ready to discuss in detail.

It is anticipated that students from the same centre will choose to prepare different general topic areas, in order to reflect the range of their individual interests. Some overlap of topic choice is, however, expected.

Students may use this assessment as an opportunity to compare and contrast different topics both from a UK perspective and from knowledge of an Italian-speaking country or countries.

Students must inform the teacher/examiner which general topic area they have chosen before the test via an Oral Topic Form, one copy of which must be given to the teacher/examiner (or visiting examiner, if applicable) in advance of the examination.

¹ With the exception of *The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world*.

A2 Unit 3: Understanding and Spoken Response in Italian

In this test, students will be rewarded for demonstrating the ability to understand spoken Italian and to use Italian to explain, to clarify, to justify a point of view, to express opinions and to defend an argument. They will have to demonstrate knowledge of the issue they have chosen to discuss and will need to show evidence of wide-ranging reading and research into this issue.

Students will introduce the issue they have chosen for up to one minute, after which the teacher/examiner will facilitate debate on this issue for up to a further four minutes.

After debate on this first chosen issue, the teacher/examiner must introduce at least **two further issues** for discussion. Students must not know in advance of the test which further issues the teacher/examiner will choose for discussion: these must be unpredictable elements of the test.

It is in the students' interest for teacher/examiners to cover a range of issues for discussion, in order that students can demonstrate both the breadth and depth of their knowledge and linguistic competence.

As students will be rewarded for the ability to understand and respond to the spoken language, it is important that the teacher/examiner's questions are sufficiently challenging to allow the candidate to access the full range of marks for *Comprehension and Development* (see mark grid on page 12 of this guide). If the teacher/examiner's questions are not sufficiently complex and challenging, students' opportunities to score high marks in this area of assessment will be constrained.

Timing of the A2 Unit 3 test

The A2 Unit 3 test should last between 11 and 13 minutes.

The initial issue (chosen by students before the test) should be debated for up to five minutes in total. Students should introduce the issue for about one minute before debate begins, and the teacher/examiner should interrupt students if this introduction exceeds about one minute. This introduction is followed by up to four minutes debate on this issue.

The rest of the test (six to eight minutes) is for discussion of at least two further issues, chosen by the teacher/examiner. Students will not know in advance of the test which issues the teacher/examiner will introduce for discussion. This time does not have to be divided precisely between these further issues, but care should be taken to ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss at least two further issues in detail. Excess material will not be assessed.

Teacher/examiners must ensure that the unpredictable issues in this unit are linked to the general topic areas described in the specification. All students at A2 will be expected to have covered most of the seven general topic areas to some degree, and students who are able to demonstrate good knowledge of any of these areas should be rewarded accordingly. Teacher/examiners should not require the candidate to produce any very detailed or specialised knowledge in the follow-on unpredictable discussions.

Choice of A2 Unit 3 issue

Students should choose an issue which they are prepared to research in depth and which is suitable for debate. Students must take a definite stance on the issue and maintain this during their assessment.

There is no requirement in the A2 Unit 3 oral test for students to demonstrate knowledge of countries and contexts in which Italian is spoken, though of course they are free to do so.

Students have a completely free choice of the issue they wish to debate; **it does not have to relate to any of the AS or A2 general topic areas.**

As students have to indicate a stance on the issue they have chosen, they would be well advised to consider carefully the way in which the issue for discussion is phrased. It is often useful to use a statement beginning 'I think that ...' or 'In my opinion ...' in order that the stance taken is clear.

Examples of suitable issues, making the stance clear, are ‘I think that university education should be free to all students’, or ‘In my opinion, the ban on smoking in public places is wrong’. Please note that these are given only as an indication of the sort of possible issues and stances that students might consider.

Students must complete an Oral Chosen Issue form in advance of the test, on which they must write a brief statement about the chosen issue. One copy of this form must be given to the teacher/examiner before the test. Students must take a copy of this form into the examination and may refer to this at any point during the test. One copy of the Oral Chosen Issue form must be sent, with the recording, to the examiner.

Preparing students for the oral tests

The AS Unit 1 test

For AS Unit 1, students must choose one of these general topic areas:

- Youth culture and concerns
- Lifestyle: health and fitness
- The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world
- Education and employment.

Students have a free choice of these areas.

These areas are the four AS general topic areas which will have been studied in class, but in preparation for the Unit 1 test, students should be encouraged to undertake additional, independent research. They have the opportunity to investigate the general topic area of their choice in greater depth and the freedom to introduce aspects of the topic in which they are interested.

In preparation for this test, teachers can build on their students’ natural curiosity, creativity and individual interests. Possible activities might include the following:

- Students work in small groups to identify which of the general topic areas interests them most, and aspects of that area which they might explore.
- Individual students research a particular aspect of the general topic area they have chosen and present it to the rest of the group. Students might prepare a PowerPoint presentation, a worksheet or vocabulary list for their classmates, or an activity for their classmates to do.
- Students interview each other and/or their teacher to canvass opinion and ideas about a particular topic.
- Students write mind maps to identify links between aspects of the topic and to expand and order their ideas.
- Students consider questions for each other about the general topic area they have chosen, and practise answering these questions in as much detail as possible.
- Students time themselves (or each other) talking about a particular subtopic of the general topic area they have chosen, trying to increase each time the amount of time they can talk without needing to be prompted (from 10 seconds, to 15, to 20, etc).

When researching the general topic area they have chosen, students may use internet-derived sources, but should also be encouraged to refer to books, newspapers, magazines, television and radio programmes. They might also use examples from their own life to illustrate a point, or they might ask their classmates, teachers or the foreign language assistant for help and ideas. Students might consider comparing, for example, reactions to a specific issue in the UK and in other countries.

Teachers should share the content of the assessment grids for this unit with their students, so that students are fully aware of the assessment demands and can bear these in mind when preparing for the test.

Students must be aware that teacher/examiners are not allowed to rephrase or expand on the initial **four** questions on the stimulus text for this unit, and that students should answer these questions as fully as possible.

If a student provides a particularly full answer to the third question that pre-empts the fourth question, the teacher/examiner should still ask the fourth question. This is done to ensure that all candidates have the same assessment experience, but students need to be advised that this could occur.

The 15 minutes preparation time

Before the Unit 1 test, students will have 15 minutes to study a stimulus text linked to the general topic area they have chosen. Students must not write on this stimulus, but can make notes on a separate piece of paper. Both the stimulus and any notes must be taken into the exam room, and students can refer to these at any point during the test. However, students must not refer to dictionaries or any other resources during the preparation time.

Teachers may wish to advise their students of the following to ensure that they make good use of their time:

- Begin by reading the entire text through (possibly two or three times).
- Make bullet point notes of the main points of the text.
- Make a note of any vocabulary from the text which might be useful in discussion of this topic.
- Do not waste time writing out complete sentences; you will not be allowed to read out long prepared statements anyway (remember that marks are awarded for spontaneity in this unit).
- Consider the types of questions which might be asked about the text, and your answers to these questions.
- Identify any vocabulary you already know that might be useful when answering questions on this topic.

The A2 Unit 3 oral test

For A2 Unit 3, students choose an issue they wish to debate and must take a stance on this issue. They do not have to choose an issue related to the country/culture whose language they are studying, but they can do so if they wish. The issue does not have to relate to one of the general topic areas in the Edexcel specification.

Much of the preparation for this unit will be similar to that for Unit 1 (see above). Teachers should share the assessment grids for this unit with the students, and make sure that students are aware of the need to defend the stance that they have adopted on their chosen initial issue.

When choosing the issue they wish to debate for the first part of this test, students would be well-advised to choose an issue about which they have a strong opinion. As mentioned previously, they should phrase the title of the issue so that their stance is clear, for example 'I think that ...' or 'In my opinion ...'. They must be sure that the issue can provide them with sufficient material for a one-minute presentation followed by four minutes of debate (they should have four or five different arguments in support of their point of view) and can include facts and figures to support their argument.

Examining technique

Teacher/examiners should take every care to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the oral tests, as tests which are conducted incorrectly can adversely affect the students' marks.

Teacher/examiners conducting the tests need to put the students at ease, to be friendly and approachable and to ensure that the questions asked encourage the students to achieve the highest standard of which they are capable. They must balance this with the responsibility to conduct the test to comply with the conditions of the Edexcel specification. Students will also expect that the test will be conducted with due seriousness and formality.

In order to put students at ease, the teacher/examiner should ensure that the examination room is prepared well in advance, providing sufficient space (including table space on which students may put the AS Unit 1 allocated stimulus and any notes, or the A2 Unit 3 oral form) for both the teacher/examiner and each student to feel comfortable.

The teacher/examiner should ask a range of questions which will push the students to reach their linguistic 'ceiling'. With the exception of the four prescribed questions on the AS Unit 1 stimulus, which must not be rephrased, the teacher/examiner should encourage students to expand on answers and to provide detail and clarification.

In the A2 Unit 3 test, the teacher/examiner should challenge the students' point of view, allowing students to defend their opinion and to demonstrate the ability to debate. In the A2 Unit 3 test, the teacher/examiner must also ensure that the questions are sufficiently complex and challenging to allow students to access the full range of marks available for *Comprehension*. General conversation should be avoided, as it is not appropriate in this test. Students should continue to demonstrate their ability to debate and discuss issues throughout the test and the teacher/examiner should give them every opportunity to do so. In-depth, specialist and/or factual knowledge is not expected in the Unit 3 test.

The teacher/examiner should establish eye contact with the students, make the students feel that the teacher/examiner is listening intently to the responses and should refrain from interrupting or from talking too much. It is the teacher/examiner's role to keep the discussion going, to encourage the students and to ensure that the test is correctly conducted, but their contribution should be kept to a minimum. The teacher/examiner must not correct students' language, nor express disapproval. The test should conclude on a positive note and students should leave the exam room feeling that they have given the best performance they possibly could.

Examining technique checklist for AS Unit 1 and A2 Unit 3

- The teacher/examiner should put the candidate at ease and remain friendly and encouraging throughout.
- The teacher/examiner should ask open questions and offer encouragement.
- The teacher/examiner should not proffer anecdotes, opinions, advice or information.
- The conversation/discussion should flow naturally.
- The teacher/examiner should elicit from the candidate a range of functions, for example narrate, explain, clarify, hypothesise, justify, speculate, describe.
- The teacher/examiner must not allow the candidate to recite large amounts of pre-learned material.
- The teacher/examiner should encourage students to reach their linguistic ceiling.
- The test should end on a positive note.
- The teacher/examiner must keep to the time allocated to the test.

Assessment criteria

Students will be rewarded for their performances according to the following assessment criteria, which will be applied on a 'best fit' basis.

Unit 1

Mark	Quality of language (Accuracy) (AO3)
0	No rewardable language.
1	Isolated examples of correct language; pronunciation and intonation often impede communication.
2-3	Many basic errors, impeding communication at times; pronunciation and intonation erratic, not always comprehensible.
4-5	Accuracy variable but errors rarely impede communication; pronunciation and intonation inconsistent but comprehensible.
6-7	Generally accurate but some errors in more complex language; pronunciation and intonation generally good.
8	Highly accurate with perhaps some very minor errors; pronunciation and intonation authentic.

Mark	Quality of language (Range of Lexis) (AO3)
0	No rewardable language.
1	Very basic lexis; minimal command of structure.
2-3	Lexis restricted; operates generally in simple sentences.
4-5	Adequate range of lexis; limited range of structures.
6-7	Good range of lexis with some examples of more complex structures.
8	Wide range of lexis and good variety of structures with only occasional limitation.

Mark	Response (AO1)
0	No rewardable language.
1-4	Little spontaneity; cannot develop responses; very reliant on examiner's language.
5-8	Few examples of spontaneous discourse; limited development of responses; often fails to respond appropriately to questions; needs prompting.
9-12	Some examples of fluent discourse but not always spontaneous or well developed; some hesitation in more complex areas; difficulty with some questions.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse ably developed; responds usually without undue hesitation; deals adequately with most questions.
17-20	High incidence of spontaneous, fluent discourse; able to respond readily to all questions; develops and sustains discourse well.

Mark	Understanding (Stimulus specific) (AO1)
0	No understanding of stimulus.
1	Limited answers to prescribed questions, demonstrating poor understanding of stimulus.
2	Satisfactory answers to prescribed questions, demonstrating adequate understanding of stimulus.
3	Detailed answers to prescribed questions, demonstrating good understanding of stimulus.
4	Full and detailed answers to prescribed questions, demonstrating excellent understanding of stimulus.

Mark	Understanding (General topic area) (AO1)
0	No rewardable language.
1-2	Hardly any relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating poor understanding of general topic area.
3-4	Few relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating limited understanding of general topic area.
5-6	Some relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating satisfactory understanding of general topic area.
7-8	Many relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating good understanding of general topic area.
9-10	Wealth of relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating excellent understanding of general topic area.

Unit 3

Mark	Response (AO1)
0	No rewardable material.
1-4	Minimal incidence of spontaneous discourse; very limited range of structures; no use of abstract language.
5-8	Limited incidence of spontaneous discourse; limited range of lexis and structures; very little evidence of abstract language.
9-12	Satisfactory incidence of spontaneous discourse; range of lexis and structures adequate with some ability to handle language of abstract concepts.
13-16	Frequent examples of spontaneous discourse; good range of lexis and structures; good use of abstract concepts.
17-20	Very high incidence of spontaneous discourse; impressive range of lexis and structures.

Mark	Quality of language (AO3)
0	No rewardable material.
1-2	Very flawed language, often impeding comprehension; pronunciation and intonation very inauthentic.
3	Basic errors, impeding comprehension at times; pronunciation and intonation erratic.
4	Accuracy variable with some basic errors; pronunciation and intonation generally good with some lapses.
5	Good level of accuracy with occasional, usually minor, errors; good pronunciation and intonation.
6-7	Highly accurate; excellent pronunciation and intonation.

Mark	Reading and research (AO2)
0	No rewardable material.
1	Scant evidence of any reading and research into the chosen issue and other topics discussed; very superficial.
2-3	Little evidence of reading and research into the chosen issue and other topics discussed; obvious gaps and very little detail.
4	Adequate evidence of reading and research into the chosen issue and other topics discussed but overall lacks breadth and detail; somewhat inconsistent.
5-6	Good to very good evidence of wide reading and research into the chosen issue and other topics discussed with occasional gaps; some pertinent detail at times.
7	Excellent evidence of in-depth and very wide reading and research into the chosen issue and other topics discussed; excellent detail.

Mark	Comprehension and development (AO1)
0	No rewardable material.
1-4	Minimal comprehension; many basic question forms unknown; minimal development.
5-7	Limited comprehension; basic question forms generally known but little beyond; limited development of resources.
8-10	Adequate level of comprehension; responds appropriately to basic question forms but experiences problems with more complex question forms and structures; adequate development.
11-13	Copes with a variety or wide variety of question forms although more complex forms pose problems at times; generally good to very good development of responses.
14-16	Excellent level of comprehension; responds at a consistently high level to a wide range of complex and challenging question forms; excellent development.

Part 2 Exemplar material

AS Unit 1 specimen tests and commentaries

Candidate 1

Youth culture and concerns – sample stimulus 1



Comments on the oral assessment

The examiner starts by asking the first set question, *‘Di che servizio si parla in questo articolo e perché viene ritenuto molto utile?’*

She enounces clearly and sympathetically, to make sure that the candidate can get the full implication and answer it completely. The candidate answers the first part of the question but needs to be reminded of the second part. The examiner repeats the relevant part of the question. As there was no rephrasing the impact on the candidate’s mark is likely not to be too serious, but students must be aware that they are expected to answer questions fully and develop their discourse accordingly.

The second question is answered more fully. For the third question the examiner adheres to the wording as in the sample material, and this is indeed what is expected of her. However, after it has become clear that the question is to be asked all in one go, and any further questioning might affect the candidates’ marks, a re-wording like *‘Perché il ritorno dalla discoteca è un problema e quali sarebbero secondo te le possibili soluzioni?’* is more likely to elicit a more articulated answer, without further prompting. Re-wording is obviously not at the examiners’ discretion, as they have to adhere strictly to the wording of the stimulus.

The candidate’s answer to question 3 is not particularly well developed but is satisfactory on the whole. Question 4 is more straightforward and the candidate answers it in full, although the opinion offered is only just adequate.

This takes us approximately 4 minutes into the exam, which is the expected length of examining time spent on discussion about the stimulus material. The examiner signals the move to discussion on the general topic area. The discussion covers drinking among young people, different attitudes to drinking in Italy and the UK, the advantages or disadvantages of age restriction for the purchase of alcohol, and then the use of drugs. The candidate responds reasonably fluently and deals adequately with most questions. By way of rounding off the exam the candidate is asked to highlight what she believes to be the most serious problem for young people. The candidate offers the view that smoking might be the most serious problem as people are less aware of the consequences.

The exam is drawn to a close after just over nine minutes, therefore within the time range suggested in the specification.

Assessment feedback

Quality of language (Accuracy)

The language is highly accurate, with only occasional, minor errors. Pronunciation and intonation are near-native.

The candidate is definitely in the top band for this criterion.

Mark: 8

Quality of language (Range of Lexis)

The range of lexis is more than adequate, but not impressive. There are some colloquial and idiomatic expression but the general level of lexis is rather plain, at times even a little pedestrian. There are some examples of complex structures, but not a great variety.

Mark: 6-7 band

Response

The candidate is spontaneous and fluent, she does not hesitate and deals well with most questions, but perhaps the discourse is not developed enough for the top band.

Mark: 13-16 band

Understanding (Stimulus specific)

The candidate demonstrates good understanding of the stimulus and answers to prescribed questions in sufficient detail. On a couple of occasions she needs to be prompted by the examiner to complete her answer.

Mark: 3

Understanding (General topic area)

The candidate offers some relevant ideas and opinions but rarely goes beneath the surface. The understanding she demonstrates of the general topic area is perhaps more satisfactory than good. Again, it must be borne in mind that a years' focus on a specific general topic area in preparation for the oral exam is likely to produce better understanding and more ideas.

Mark: 5-6 band

Candidate 2

Education and employment – sample stimulus 2



Comments on the oral assessment

The candidate is an adult and she is able to draw from her own experience to understand *'telelavoro'*. She gives an articulate answer to the first question, although she does not mention the traffic law in California or percentage of distance-workers.

The examiner introduces question 2 while the candidate is still developing her answer to question 1, as he can anticipate that she is likely to cover question 2 material in her answer to question 1. This takes the candidate slightly aback, but she provides a convincing answer in the end. The answer to the third question is reasonably articulate as the candidate is able to draw on her own experience. The candidate offers a reasonable answer to question 4, showing understanding of the sense of isolation which might derive from working from home. This concludes Section A, about 3 minutes and 30 seconds into the exam. Having announced that they are now moving to the more general conversation the examiner decides (probably a little unwisely) to remain on the question of isolation caused by modern technology. This is in fact not strictly within the general topic area chosen by the candidate, who is at first a little bewildered and tries to keep it within the work scenario. Then the discussion moves on to consider the idea that computers may spell the end of books and learning as we know it, then adult education, the extent to which school prepares one for work, the importance of university education and concludes with a question on education in Japan. The exam ends with a positive remark about the discussion being interesting but we need to stop here.

Assessment feedback

Quality of language (Accuracy)

The candidate's production is generally accurate with only occasional minor errors. There are instances of unsuccessful attempts to use an impersonal form, some errors with prepositions, one missed agreement, but communication is never impaired. Pronunciation and intonation are generally good, with the exception of the candidate's difficulty in differentiating the sounds 'l' and 'r'.

Mark: 6-7 band

Quality of language (Range of Lexis)

The range of lexis is adequate. Sometimes she has to struggle to find a word, sometimes she uses the wrong one (*'meglie'* instead of *'migliori'* which seems a question of range rather than accuracy). There are some examples of complex structures, but they are not always used successfully (for example *Io non dico il sistema è molto diverso*). Perhaps band 4-5 is a better fit than the one above.

Response

The candidate speaks spontaneously and fluently. She only hesitates slightly in a couple of instances when she has to struggle to find the correct word or because she was taken aback by the question. Her discourse is mostly ably developed and she deals adequately with most questions.

Mark: lower end of 13-16 band

Understanding (Stimulus specific)

Her understanding of the stimulus was probably greater than her answers testify, but having missed some details in her answers to the set questions it seems fair to stop at 3.

Understanding (General topic area)

She offers many relevant ideas and opinions, demonstrating good understanding of the general topic area.

Mark: 7-8 band

Candidate 3

Lifestyle: health and fitness – sample stimulus 1



Comments on the oral assessment

The examiner asks the first set question, on how TV contributes to eating disorders, which the candidate has no problem in understanding. She answers it adequately, covering munching in front of television and the idea of the image of beauty promoted by TV but she does not mention the effects of food advertising to which young viewers are exposed. In answer to the second question she suggests that schools ought to give more information either through lessons or through material to read at home, as well as encouraging more sport. For question 3 she suggests that sport is important but other subjects are important too. Perhaps school should encourage playing sports outside school hours, evening and weekends. For question 4 she highlights the responsibility of families, often not providing the correct type of food and resorting instead to microwavable pre-cooked food.

This ends Section A, only 2 minutes into the exam, quite short of the recommended time. There is no penalisation for falling short of the recommended time: candidates will be assessed on their understanding of the stimulus and on the quality of their response to it, regardless of the time spent discussing it. It is, however, unlikely that candidates will access top bands for those criteria when too little time is spent on the discussion of the stimulus material. This candidate did not elaborate her answers to any great length, nevertheless she answered adequately. As the exam is expected to last at least 8 minutes, a shorter Section A means a longer discussion of the general topic area, during which candidates might be able to compensate for marks lost in the previous section.

The discussion flows smoothly onto Section B, with the examiner asking what is wrong with microwavable food and the candidate provides a convincing answer. Then she comments on labelling food in supermarkets. Having realised that he had not done so at the beginning of Section B, the examiner indicates that the discussion is no longer on the stimulus but on the general topic. He then asks if the government is right in telling people what to eat or not to eat and again the candidate comes up with a reasonable answer. The discussion moves on to consider the smoking ban, and the candidate suggests the perhaps odd idea that because of the ban non-smokers are now less tolerant and are more susceptible to minding people smoking in the street. When the discussion moves on to drinking the candidate shows her perplexity at the fact the government is not doing more about increasing awareness of the consequences of drinking as they did with labelling cigarette packets. After an attempt to engage the candidate on the extent to which young people look after their health, the examiner moves over to skin cancer and finally to how well the national health system works in this country.

Discussing so many subtopics is probably not ideal; fewer subtopics discussed in greater depth might put candidates in a better position to demonstrate understanding of the general topic area, but the amount of subtopics involved obviously depends on the quality of a candidate's response. In this particular case it was also necessary to introduce more subtopics because of having to make up for a shorter Section A.

Assessment feedback

Quality of language (Accuracy)

There are recurrent slips on articles, gender and agreements but not so frequent as to become disturbing. Other than these, there is one wrong verb ending (*posso/possono*) and a struggle to attempt to produce a conditional form. Comprehension is never impeded and pronunciation and intonation are very good.

Mark: 6-7 band

Quality of language (Range of Lexis)

The range of lexis is perhaps more than just adequate. The most noticeable limitations are *cuocere/cucinare*, a circumlocution to convey the idea of '*conservanti*', '*biglietti*' for health warning on cigarettes and '*prendi una tolleranza*'. There are some example of complex structures and although she uses mainly '*tu*' for generalisations, there are successful attempts at using the impersonal form. This might be just enough to allow access to the 6-7 band.

Response

The candidate responds promptly and appropriately, her discourse is fluent but she does not always elaborate on the answers. There is no hesitation nor any difficulties with understanding questions. A little more familiarity with the topic area would have rightfully placed her performance comfortably in the 13-16 band, but even as it is, it might only just be enough for that band.

Understanding (Stimulus specific)

The stimulus appears to have been fully understood and the answers were sufficiently detailed, except question 1, where she failed to mention the all-important point of food advertising. In all probability it was just an oversight rather than lack of comprehension.

Mark: 3

Understanding (General topic area)

The candidate seems sufficiently acquainted with the general topic area and conveys some relevant ideas and opinions. This is a borderline performance. Having been lenient in assessing response, we must go for the lower band here (5-6).

List of suggested questions for use in the AS Unit 1 Oral Test Section B

Listed below are indications of the type of questions teacher/examiners might use in Section B of the AS Unit 1 speaking test.

In Section B of the AS Unit 1 test, the teacher/examiner should develop a discussion about the general topic area chosen by the student. This discussion should move away from the focus of the stimulus used in Section A to the general topic area and its linked subtopics. There is no requirement to cover all of the subtopics. The teacher/examiner may choose one or more of these subtopics for discussion. The number of subtopics covered will depend on the student's response and the student may have more opportunity to demonstrate the extent of his or her knowledge and linguistic ability through a thorough discussion on one or two subtopics than a superficial discussion of several.

Section B will last for not less than 4 minutes, as part of the overall test which lasts 8-10 minutes.

These questions are not prescriptive, but indicate the type of question that a teacher/examiner might ask. An example is given for each of the prescribed subtopics. Open questions should be used where possible in order to elicit a full response from the candidate.

The general principle of the discussion should always be to start by asking more straightforward, accessible questions and then to move on to questions that can progressively take students towards their 'linguistic ceiling'. The teacher/examiner should encourage the student to expand his or her answers and to give reasons for his or her opinions.

Students will have chosen to be tested on one of the following general topic areas and their subtopics, as listed on page 22 of the specification.

- **Youth culture and concerns**
 - Music and fashion
 - Technology (eg MP3/blogs/mobile phones/internet/games)
 - Relationships (family/friendships and peer pressure)
 - Drink, drugs, sex
- **Lifestyle: health and fitness**
 - Sport and exercise
 - Food and diet
 - Health issues (eg smoking, skin cancer, health services)
- **The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world**
 - Tourist information, travel and transport
 - Weather (eg natural disasters, climate change)
 - Pollution and recycling
- **Education and employment**
 - Education (schooling and higher education)
 - Education policy and student issues
 - The world of work (eg the changing work scene, job opportunities and unemployment)

Youth culture and concerns

Music and fashion

Do you think that young people spend too much money on music/fashion?

Secondo te, i giovani spendono troppi soldi per articoli di moda o per la musica?

Technology (eg MP3/blogs/mobile phones/internet/games)

What are the advantages and disadvantages of technology?

Quali sono i vantaggi e gli svantaggi della tecnologia?

Relationships (family/friendships and peer pressure)

Who has more influence on young people, family or friends?

Chi ha più influenza sui giovani, la famiglia o gli amici?

Drink, drugs, sex

Why do young people smoke/take drugs/drink alcohol?

Perché i giovani fumano/si drogano/bevono alcol?

Lifestyle: health and fitness

Sport and exercise

What role does sport play in society today?

Quale ruolo ha lo sport nella società di oggi?

Food and diet

Do you think that it is important to eat a healthy diet?

Pensi che sia importante mangiare sano?

Health issues (eg smoking, skin cancer, health services)

Are you for or against the smoking ban in public places in the UK?

Sei favorevole o contrario al divieto di fumare nei locali pubblici nel Regno Unito/in Italia?

The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Italian-speaking world

Tourist information, travel and transport

Do you often travel abroad?

Fai spesso viaggi all'estero?

Weather (eg natural disasters, climate change)

People often travel these days. Do you think that this affects the climate?

Oggi giorno si viaggia molto. Pensi che ciò abbia un effetto sul clima?

Pollution and recycling

Are young people interested in the environment?

I giovani si curano dei problemi ambientali?

Education and employment

Education (schooling and higher education)

Which are the most important school subjects?

Quali sono le materie scolastiche più importanti?

Education policy and student issues

Do you agree that students should pay for university education?

Sei d'accordo che gli studenti debbano pagare per andare all'università?

The world of work (eg the changing work scene, job opportunities and unemployment)

Which professions are (un)popular today?

Quali professioni sono più/meno popolari al giorno d'oggi?

A2 Unit 3 specimen tests and commentaries

Candidate 4



Comments on the oral assessment

Chosen issue: *Era ora che il governo italiano si decidesse ad accettare le donne nelle forze armate.*

The candidate is an adult, with an obvious interest in military matters.

He introduces his view on the opening of the Italian armed forces to women, demonstrating knowledge of when and in what context the decision was taken. He suggests that the move entails some problems but definitely sees it as positive. The examiner suggests that it may be more a question of political correctness. The candidate does not rule out political correctness as one of the motives but maintains that the presence of women is highly desirable, in spite of some of the problems that this entails. The examiner suggests that nothing should be barred from them in the name of equal opportunities, and the candidate sustains his views that women can be more wisely employed in tasks other than front line combat. The examiner then introduces the question of possible resistance from a traditionally male-dominated environment and the candidate has enough counter-argument to defend his position.

Almost 5 minutes into the exam, the examiner moves the discussion away from the chosen issue and asks the candidate for his views on the suspension of conscription. The response is centred on the positive effects this has in terms of military efficiency. The examiner shifts the focus on the personal level and the candidate responds with reference to women. Whether this is lack of comprehension or the candidate not being on the same wave-length as the examiner is difficult to say. Quite rightly, the examiner prevents the candidate from carrying on with an irrelevant answer and clarifies that he was thinking of the young men who no longer are subjected to compulsory service. It must be emphasised that it is never in candidates' interest to let them carry on with irrelevant answers, as these would gain no credit either for comprehension or response. A timely clarification, on the other hand, is not likely to have significant adverse effects on either of these criteria.

After this, the impacts of the suspension of conscription at a personal level are explored in sufficient depth. More could have been said about young people's chance to 'fly the nest' and become more self-reliant, or the educational value of doing something for the community, the possibility of engaging young people on some form of compulsory community service, etc, but it was time to move to the third issue. The examiner chose to introduce the issue of equal opportunities in the workplace and the role of women between motherhood and career. The candidate has enough to offer on this. The exam is drawn to a close after just over 12 minutes, with a positive remark about the interesting debate.

The whole exam was centred on three issues. As the candidate was going strong on the chosen issue, it was wise to continue its discussion to the maximum time allowed for it (up to four minutes after the first minute's presentation). The examiner's questions are sufficiently complex and challenging to test the candidate's level of comprehension of the spoken language.

Assessment feedback

Response

He responds promptly and develops his discourse spontaneously, but his range of language and structures is good rather than impressive. Band 13-16 may be a better fit than the top band.

Quality of language

There are frequent examples of missed gender and number agreements, even if the effort of achieving accuracy is evident. Quite a few instances of missed subjunctive or of wrong syntax (*'avere il uomo e anche la donna lavorando'*) and occasional errors with articles and prepositions. Comprehension is never impeded and verbal endings are almost always correct. Good pronunciation and intonation, with only minor slips. This performance is somewhere between 4 and 5 marks.

Reading and research

The candidate has an obvious interest in the matter, and his familiarity with the subject may go back a while longer than the preparation for the exam. This is one of the strong points of this exam. The candidate does not need to take on a role, he can play himself, and if he has a genuine interest and a strong view on a specific issue, it is only too right to choose that issue as a starting point for the exam. There is evidence of wide reading and research for at least one of the further issues but he has enough to offer for the third one as well. Taken as an overall performance, this candidate can access the highest mark for reading and research.

Mark: 7

Comprehension and development

The candidate responds at a constantly high level to a wide range of challenging questions and develops his discourse very well. There is only one instance when the candidate is about to answer inappropriately, probably not having paid enough attention to the question rather than because of lack of comprehension. The examiner's prompt intervention clarifying his question puts the candidate on the right track and the effect of the incident is not such as to prevent access to the top band.

Mark band: 14-16

Candidate 5



Comments on the oral assessment

Chosen issue: *L'introduzione dell'ecopass a Milano.*

The candidate's performance is helped by the fact that he is very fluent in the language, but it takes much more than fluency to succeed in this exam: if fluent students do not prepare adequately, if they do not pay sufficient attention to the register they use or, if on the examiner's part an exam is not properly conducted, the advantage of being fluent can easily be lost.

The candidate chose to discuss the introduction of the congestion charge in Milan and appears to be very well informed on the issue. The candidate presents his stance for one minute, outlining the benefits of the initiative. The examiner challenges him with the fact that this may cause traffic jams just outside the congestion area. The candidate has appropriate information to defend his stance. The examiner challenges him again, with the idea that this measure might discriminate against those who cannot afford to pay and, after that, on technical issues, referring to the fact that wrong people have been fined because of technical faults. The examiner challenges spontaneously, but she has obviously thought of her arguments in advance of the exam. This is very important, as bland challenges can only produce a bland debate. The candidate defends his stance well, showing evidence of wide reading and research on the issue and an ability to sustain the debate.

At the appropriate time the examiner moves the debate on to other issues. She introduces a question about what individuals can do for a cleaner world to direct the focus of the debate to nuclear energy. The candidate appears to be well informed on this issue also and develops his answer well. The examiner feels that the issue can be explored further and, after a little hesitation, she asks him to clarify his stance on the issue. This prompts a well-developed answer from the candidate. A weaker candidate may have needed further prompting. It is always useful to have some prompts ready in case the discussion dries up.

There is a good transition to the referendum issue, which represents a good challenge for an able candidate. Again the candidate articulates his answers fully, presents his views on the issue and justifies them. Perhaps with a candidate of this calibre the debate on this issue could have been furthered. However the examiner chooses to follow the link on abortion and, from there, to the right of the Catholic Church to influence political decisions. The candidate still copes very well but does not seem to be as strong on this as he has been on other issues. It may have been preferable to push the candidate to his ceiling with the issues with which he was going strong. This may have elicited an even higher level of debate. Although it is not advisable to ask questions from a script, it is necessary for an examiner to prepare well-articulated questions and arguments on the further issues as well as on the chosen one. Well-articulated questions determine the level of debate throughout the whole exam and enable students to demonstrate their level of comprehension of the spoken language, which is specifically assessed in the mark scheme. Indeed, Unit 3 is the only form of assessment of comprehension of the spoken language at A2 level and the absence of 'complex and challenging question forms' may bar candidates from accessing the top band of marks.

Assessment feedback

Response

The candidate has native fluency, articulates his discourse very well, using an impressive range of vocabulary and structures. The only wrong lexical item (*'danneggio'*) is conspicuous in an otherwise impeccable performance, but does not prevent the candidate from accessing the top band.

Mark band: 17-20

Quality of language

Virtually faultless, with native pronunciation and intonation.

Mark band: 6-7

Reading and research

The candidate shows himself to be very well informed on the chosen issue and most of the other topics. He discusses and supports most of his ideas with evidence derived from extensive reading and research. This is perhaps less apparent with the last two issues discussed, but there is enough evidence of reading and research on the overall exam to warrant access to the highest mark.

Mark: 7

Comprehension and development

Perhaps the question forms could have been more complex and challenging. Nevertheless, the excellent level of comprehension, the consistently high level of response and the excellent development are sufficient to set the performance in the highest band.

Mark band: 14-16

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