



Examiner's Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2018

Pearson Edexcel GCE

In A Level Russian (6RU04_01)

Purpose of the unit

The unit is designed to test candidates' ability to write accurately in Russian, structure their responses and demonstrate their knowledge of the target-language culture and / or society.

This was the final examination of this unit for candidates wishing to take it for the first time. The range of responses from those candidates from centres where Russian is taught within the curriculum was as wide as ever. Examiners enjoyed reading these, and it is clear that note has been taken of the comments and suggestions made in previous reports for this unit. Very many candidates were able to achieve high marks overall because they had been comprehensively prepared for the demands of the examination.

Structure of the examination

This unit requires candidates to answer three questions in two and a half hours. The translation (section A) is worth 10 of the 100 marks available and a proportionate amount of time to spend on it would be 25-30 minutes. Section B and Section C are each worth 45 marks, and so an hour on each of these would represent appropriate division of time.

Advice to centres

The number of answers to questions in section B and C has reduced significantly over the life of this specification. This is pleasing, as candidates are significantly disadvantaged when they write overlong answers. Where answers were overlong, they usually came from native or near-native speaker candidates in centres where Russian is not taught. Examiners would like, once again, to remind centres that the upper word limit for these sections is 200 words. For section C, quotations, proper nouns and dates may be excluded from the overall word count. Examiners stop reading at the end of the sentence in which the 200th word lies. This may impact candidates who have not had appropriate guidance and have therefore written overlong essays.

In both Section B and Section C, overlong answers lost marks for Organisation and Development, and it was also often true that they failed to answer the question fully, as key information was contained in the section that lay beyond the word limit. Centres and candidates, especially non-learners in centres where Russian is not taught, should note that there is more space provided than is usually necessary for 200 words and that the space is not an indicator of how much candidates should write. There were very few short answers, as always,

but where an answer was short, it often contained very little information or argument and therefore scored very low marks.

Based on their performance in this paper, candidates are offered the following advice:

- Ensure that you prepare thoroughly for the translation task by studying the prescribed grammar list in the specification
- Divide your time carefully in the examination and do not spend too long on any one part
- Learn grammatical endings for verbs and nouns thoroughly, paying particular attention to the use of cases after prepositions, as this is the weakest area for many candidates
- Seek to incorporate a range of more complex grammatical structures into your written work, such as conditionals, subjunctives, compound conjunctions, gerunds and participles
- Write your essay in paragraphs so that the examiner can follow your points
- Ensure that your handwriting is clear and legible. Good presentation will make your essay much easier for the examiner to follow.

Section A: Translation

Section A of this paper required candidates to translate a short passage of English into Russian. The passage is split into 30 assessable elements and one 'point' is gained for each correct element at the marking stage. A mark out of 10 is awarded based on the number of correct elements (see the mark scheme). For an element to be considered correct it must have all the details contained in the English original (i.e. no word omitted) and all the grammatical endings (case endings, agreements and verb endings) had to be correct. One spelling or transliteration error was allowed per element, provided that it was not grammatical and did not affect the sound significantly when read aloud.

Overall, the majority of candidates performed well in this task. Very many learner candidates were able to achieve 7 or 8 marks, and the number scoring 9 and 10 has increased over recent years. Some learner candidates were able to score 10 marks this year, although the number doing so remains low. It remains the case that many native speakers lost marks due to the omission of elements. As is the case every year, those with very little ability to manipulate the grammar of the language scored very low marks, perhaps 1 or 2, despite knowing much of the required vocabulary. They often gained points for elements such as 'можно', 'чтобы смотреть', 'так делают' and 'говорит он', these

elements having been designed to allow candidates to gain marks at the lower end of the scale. Those who have not mastered at least some of the more complex grammar required at this level will not perform well.

Candidates faced the most difficulty with the following elements:

- 'download' was often not known.
- 'never watch' was translated as 'некогда не смотрят' or 'не' was omitted.
- 'older people' was not translated with an appropriate comparative.
- 'consider this strange' was translated as 'считают это странно'.
- 'about what' was not translated using a compound conjunction where one was needed.
- 'on social media' was not known by many candidates.
- 'my parents like' was often translated incorrectly.

Section B: Creative and Discursive Essays

In the creative essays in Section B, the best essays (scoring 13-15 for Understanding and Response) were succinct and succeeded in telling the whole story in the space available, or built sufficient suspense to leave the reader wondering about the character(s) or what might happen next. Good answers to question 2c, the newspaper article, were written in an appropriate journalistic style. Almost exclusively, the creative essays were attempted by non-learner candidates who had not received guidance on what might constitute successful creative writing; candidates must pay careful attention to the planning of their work.

Poorly planned pieces often contained lengthy scene setting or description of character but little action. Writing a successful piece of creative writing in 200 words is a challenging task and not something which should be embarked upon without first planning content or structure. There were very few completely irrelevant essays, although some were considered to be 'pedestrian' or failed to grab the examiners' attention. They usually scored no more than 7-9 for Understanding & Response ('satisfactory [...] response to stimulus').

The vast majority of candidates who have been taught Russian in schools wrote excellent discursive essays. There is a great deal of good practice in centres as shown in the candidates' work. Many candidates wrote extensive plans on their examination papers and such good practice is to be encouraged as carefully planned essays were, in virtually all cases, more successful. Careful planning by candidates results in balanced discursive essays where the ideas are well thought through and it seems difficult to conceive why a candidate would choose to launch into such a piece of writing without a plan.

In order to score 10-12 or 13-15 for Understanding & Response, essays must be balanced and consider both sides of the argument. As every year, centres are strongly advised to take careful note of this requirement. Non-learner candidates

taking GCE Russian, in centres where Russian is not taught, are significantly disadvantaged if they are not made aware of this requirement, and so write unbalanced essays. One-sided essays can score a maximum of 9 for Understanding & Response and some overlong essays were considered one sided as the entirety of the second half lay beyond the 200th word. Such essays scored a maximum of 9 for Understanding & Response and also for Organisation and Development, even if they were linguistically impressive. Balanced and well-structured discursive essays should have a conclusion in which the candidate comes down on one side or the other, but until this point, the best candidates remained neutral themselves and discussed ideas in abstract terms, avoiding the use of the first person.

In order to score 9-10 for Range & Application of Language, learner candidates are encouraged to use wide or more complex constructions, such as passives, gerunds, relative clauses, compound conjunctions and conditionals. A range of varied essay phrases is also useful as this enables weaker candidates to score higher marks. They should be aware, though, that a string of such phrases is not able to make up for a lack of content or ideas; careful planning and consideration of the depth of ideas which the candidate has before beginning will result in a better essay across the board. Candidates should also be encouraged to ensure that they have sufficient topic vocabulary when they select a discursive essay to answer. It is perfectly possible for candidates to achieve 5 for Accuracy for their discursive essay; indeed, many learner candidates did so. Accuracy does not have to be perfect to achieve this, but the essay must show an impressive command of noun and verb grammar and give the impression of accuracy throughout.

The most popular creative essay this year was question 2b (the strange shop spotted on the way home), and the most popular discursive essay question was 2f (young people and reading for pleasure). The least popular questions overall were 2c (newspaper article on traffic in Moscow) and 2d (traditions dying out).

Section C: Research-Based Essays

The Section C Research-Based Essay was, as last year, very well handled by a high proportion of candidates from those centres where Russian is taught in the curriculum. In nearly all cases, the essays from learner candidates were a pleasure to read and the examiners would once again like to express their gratitude to teachers for their excellent preparation of candidates for this section. Many candidates' essays demonstrated their considerable, in-depth research and showed an impressive command of language and structure.

Candidates are reminded of the importance of addressing the question on the paper; essays which did not actually answer the analytical part of the question scored a maximum of 13-18 for Reading, Research & Understanding. In order to score 19-24 or 25-30, essays need to offer opinion and analysis as well as factual content. This will usually involve stating a fact and then telling the reader

what this fact shows us or why it is important or relevant. Conversely, the stating of opinion without sufficient evidence will also often lead to lower marks; the requirement for this unit is that candidates do detailed, sustained research in advance and come to the examination armed with facts which they then use to back up their analysis.

Sadly, as in previous years, poor preparation for the examination led to a number of candidates writing almost entirely irrelevant essays or essays which simply retold the plot of a book or film, thus scoring very low marks. There remain a number of candidates who wrote answers to 3(a), 3(b) or 3(d) which, while occasionally interesting, scored zero as they did not meet the clear requirement on page 40 of the specification and on the exam paper itself for the research to relate to the 'culture and / or society of a Russian-language country, countries or community.' Examiners accepted any country which formed part of the former Soviet Union or the former Russian empire as being 'Russian speaking' for the purposes of this section, and, as usual, there was a range of essays on the former Soviet republics for 3(a).

Candidates are reminded of the importance of writing a structured essay in this section. Those candidates who had written detailed plans virtually always performed better, and the examiners again expressed surprise at the relative lack of such plans. There were many essays which gave lots of factual information but which were really, in essence, a regurgitation of all that is known on the topic or the plot of the book or film they had read; candidates must use their factual knowledge to answer the question and support their assertions if they are to reach the higher mark bands for Organisation & Development. Essays should have an introductory paragraph and a conclusion which refers back to the question set on the paper. Examiners were yet again surprised at the increasing number of essays which show no evidence of paragraphing and attention to the order of the points being made.

Centres are reminded that quotations do not count within the word limit and also that proper names need not be included. Very few essays contain a bibliography or sources of factual information. Whilst this is not a requirement for the higher mark bands, some 'facts' used by candidates did seem unlikely and proper referencing of sources would help candidates to prove that they have done extensive research.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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